The Washington Monthly

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■

THE OPRAH-FICATION OF AMERICAN JOURNALISM

■

REVIEWS BY JONATHAN ALTER AND PAUL KRUGMAN

SPECIAL REPORT

The Missing Issues

Questions that should be answered in the 1996 presidential campaign, but that probably won't even get asked

Matthew Cooper, Jason DeParle, Gregg Easterbrook, James Fallows, Nicholas Lemann, Suzannah Lessard, Art Levine, Joseph Nocera, Richard Reeves, Jonathan Rowe, Walter Shapiro, Scott Shuger, and Steven Waldman

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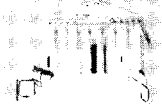
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN THE SUPREME COURT

The Cases That Define the Debate over Church and State



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Letters

Monthly-Take-All Market

In the December *Monthly*, analyzing the harm done by "winner-take-all" markets, Robert Frank and Phillip Cook wrote, "Overconfidence is likely to be especially strong in the realm of career choice, because, in addition to the usual motivational biases that support it, there is also the fact that the biggest winners are so conspicuous."

Only a few pages later, the *Monthly* itself ran this subtle appeal: "Join the *Monthly* Staff.... Come work for the magazine where James Fallows, Michael Kinsley, Nicholas Lemann, and Jonathan Alter got their start." In fairness to young people with unrealistic journalistic aspirations, shouldn't you point out that the chances of being the next James Fallows or Michael Kinsley are not substantially better than the chances of being the next Martin Scorsese or Meryl Streep?

Peter Baida
New York, NY

Gunshot Dentist

Elizabeth Austin's article, "Continuing Vacation" (November), about seminars for professionals at exotic resorts reminded me of a wonderful, true story a friend told me about such a seminar for dentists at the Alta ski resort in Utah. He was staying at the Alta Lodge and one morning went to the room where the seminar was supposed to take place and found no one in the room, not even the speaker. Later he was riding up the chair lift and found himself talking to one of the dentists from the seminar. When the dentist asked him what he did, my friend said he was from a small IRS group that was checking up on continuing education seminars at resorts. He said he and his partner took turns going to the Caribbean and the mountains. He said they checked rooms, got social security numbers, and talked to the management of hotels. The dentist stopped talking and at the top of the lift went off downhill like he was shot from a gun.

Robert Youker
Bethesda, MD

Post-Conservatism

Many citizens, with advanced degrees yet nevertheless unemployed, would probably agree with the sentiments expressed by your writer Amy Waldman, in your November cover story "Class, Not Race." Her article is very welcome, but too narrowly and moderately describes a problem central to the future well-being of our nation.

Many baby-boomers—once supposed members of the liberal counterculture movement for equality, peace, and justice—apparently were only hopping on the fad bandwagon of the moment. With economic success, they now are spouting today's conventional wisdom of conservatism. The media decry President Clinton's lack of character, but many of them exhibit the same fickleness of principle.

Other sectors—including much of the health-care establishment, business and governmental leadership, and the lawyer class—are complicit in today's moral bankruptcy, but media affluence is one of the saddest contributors to America's problems. Reporters were supposed to be watchdogs. As Waldman comments, they've now lost touch with average people—in adequately covering white-collar crime, labor news, or anything more than "he said, she said" rehashes of the elite's rhetoric and demagoguery.

Barbara Smith
Athens, OH

An Angry Re-tort

In November's "Tilting at Windmills," you advocated (not for the first time) a tort reform that would require the loser to pay the winner's costs. In many cases, such a reform would result in greater injustice.

My wife, a physician, was a defendant in a frivolous malpractice suit, filed by a patient who suffered incontinence after delivering twins. Despite an excellent defense, my wife lost. The judgement exceeded her insurance coverage and cost us most of our savings. I am glad that we didn't have to pay the plaintiff's costs in addition.

Bruce Conrad
Philadelphia, PA

A Reasonable Exchange

I have read the *Monthly* for some time now, and thoroughly enjoy its pungent (and, sadly, unique) coverage of government and politics. I was therefore saddened to see that, in attacking the military exchange system ("Tilting," October) you repeated the common error that military exchanges as a class receive a direct subsidy from the Treasury. This is not correct.

Exchanges in the United States are required to be self-supporting; their profits inure to the benefit of military morale, welfare, and recreation programs. These programs, which include such things as libraries and hobby shops, are by their nature primarily patronized by personnel living on installations, which includes a proportionately higher number of lower-

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ranking enlisted personnel. If the exchange profits were not there, these programs would have to either be abandoned or supported directly out of appropriated funds.

The commissary system, the military's supermarkets, does receive a subsidy. While reasonable people may differ as to the policy of subsidizing these entities, basic economic analysis would indicate that they benefit junior enlisted personnel (who spend a higher portion of their income on food and similar necessities) more than they benefit senior ones.

Scott W. Stucky
Colonel, USAFR
Washington, DC

Insanity

Joshua Shenk's compelling article on drug policy ("Why You Can Hate Drugs and Still Want to Legalize Them," October) is on target. The constant repetition of certain acts in the expectation of a different result is a definition of insanity. So believing, in my 1976 race for the Senate I recommended a carefully controlled and limited demonstration program of clinical treatment—with drug of choice if indicated—in a few selected cities where drug crime flourished. Guffawing comparisons with "giving gold to bank robbers" and "cars to car thieves" went unchallenged by an indolent press. That unvigilant press and the thoughtlessly jolly yawps it relished to report stopped the idea in its tracks. What they did not stop, but in fact guaranteed, was the ensuing explosion of drug-related crime which has nearly brought the nation to its knees. That is their proud collegial legacy.

James W. Symington
Washington, DC

A Taxing Argument

The gap between rich and poor was at its narrowest during the Depression. Is that what you want for our society? What counts is growth, which was great under Reagan, terrible under Carter, and anemic under Clinton. Taxing the wealthy means less investment by the wealthy and ultimately fewer jobs. Like it or not, the wealthy need to do well for everyone to do well. When times are good (helped by low taxes) the rich make out like bandits, the middle class does well, and the poor are employed. That was Reagan's record. When times are bad, and taxes and regulation are high, the rich make a little, the middle class makes less, and the poor are unemployed.

John D. Rabin
Hollywood, FL

Paul Krugman replies: I have never gotten used to the way that people make flat assertions about the economy without making any effort whatsoever to check their facts. Would it surprise Rabin to know that the average growth rate of the U.S. economy under Clinton to date has been faster than it was under Reagan? The legend of Reagan-era growth depends on blaming the disastrous first two years of Reagan's administration entirely on Jimmy Carter, while mysteriously exonerating Reagan of any responsibility for the prolonged slump that began soon after he left office. Of course most economists, whatever their political persuasion, think that presidents in general have very little effect on economic growth—if anyone in Washington bears responsibility for booms and slumps, it is the Federal Reserve.

Besides, the Depression was not exactly an era of small gaps between the rich and the poor. The U.S. only became a relatively egalitarian society after the "great compression" of income gaps that took place during and immediately after World War II.

And it was following that great compression that the economy achieved a generation of unprecedented economic growth. Cause and effect? Maybe not—but the record should at least give pause to those who would excuse vast inequities on the basis of supposed lessons of history.

The Washington Monthly

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Tilting at Windmills

The Republican campaign to make government a bad word has achieved its crowning triumph in Montgomery County, Maryland, where the Democratic County Executive has ordered the word stricken from the doors of county offices and from the letterheads and business cards used by county employees. Where once there was "Montgomery County Government," now only "Montgomery County" survives....

The best day of Bill Clinton's presidency, the beginning of his visit to Northern Ireland, was given only modest attention from much of the media. *The Washington Times* ran its story on the cheering crowds that greeted Clinton's message of reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants on page 15, and the story did not mention those cheering crowds until the 12th paragraph. *Newsweek* devoted only a few paragraphs to the event. *Time*'s story appeared on page 62. Of the networks only ABC led with the story; NBC and CBS ran it as the third or fourth item. Rita Braver of CBS concluded her report of news that I had found touching, inspiring, and full of hope with these grudging remarks: "But not even his closest staff members will claim that his influence on peace in Northern Ireland will be permanent."...

The callousness of capitalism—what conservatives love to call the market economy—was never better illustrated than by Kimberly Clark's recent announcement that it was going to eliminate 6,000 jobs. What's so bad about that, you may ask. Aren't such announcements being made all the time? But this one was made just 12 days before Christmas. The individual workers affected were given the joyful tidings the next day....

Of course, public officials can be pretty callous too. In the great spirit of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and the other top officials of New York City who recently gave themselves generous salary increases while urging austerity on teachers and other city employees, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation's top managers recently took off for a luxurious Florida hotel that advertises, according to *The Washington Post*'s Cindy Skrzycki, "four-star vacation fun" where they held a "senior management planning conference" while at the same time proposing to eliminate the jobs of 1500 of their employees.

Why, it might be asked, does senior management planning require a golf course, tennis courts, Swedish massage, saunas, jacuzzis, and outdoor pools with a poolside bar?...

"At a time when the military is complaining about declining budgets for new weapons," writes Eric Schmitt of *The New York Times*, "the Marine Corps is spending $45,000 to build a new private dining room in the Pentagon for its commandant—even though the Navy's top admiral has offered to share his."

Executive dining rooms have long been one of Washington's best-kept secrets. Although most people have heard about the White House Mess and the House and Senate Dining Rooms, few have heard of hideaway dining facilities on the sixth floor of the State Department and throughout the executive branch. The transfer of the Coast Guard from the Treasury Department to the Department of Transportation was delayed by a struggle over who would get the Coast Guard dining room, which was reputed to offer the finest cuisine in town.

Some of the cleverest accounting in the government is used to conceal the real costs of these facilities so that the dining rooms can serve shrimp and steak at prices well below the prices at restaurants of comparable comfort. Once when it was disclosed that lunches served in the Army General Officers' mess cost six times the average the officers paid, the army announced that it was going to reform: "Meal prices must be sufficient to cover operating expenses and food costs." Did the generals give up their bargain? Not on your life. They redefined expenses to exclude such items as stoves, utilities, and the salaries of waiters and cooks....

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I have taken great delight in the revival of tap dancing in the past decade, culminating in the recent Broadway success of a history of tap entitled "Bring in da Noise, Bring in da Funk." One of the frustrations of my youth as a student in New York in the forties was the virtual disappearance of tap of which I had become enamored as a boy watching Fred Astaire and Bill Robinson in the movies and vaudeville at the Kearse Theatre in my hometown, Charleston, West Virginia. The dance on Broadway in the forties was dominated by the influence of Agnes de Mille and Jerome Robbins. Their dance form was ballet, which was in, while tap was most definitely out. The most imitated ballet of all was the dream scene from the Broadway musical *Oklahoma!*, which meant every musical seemed to have a sequence in which dancers rushed around the stage in various postures of anguish to music that was a kind of faintly dissonant compromise between Stravinsky and pop. I was, as you may have guessed by now, not one of de Mille's more ardent admirers. My yearnings for tap were largely unrequited. There was a little bit in *Pal Joey* and *Guys and Dolls*—interestingly enough in both cases, tap came as part of condescendingly camp shows-within-the-show—and there was one glorious soft shoe number, performed by Ray Bolger to the song, "Once in Love with Amy," in *Where's Charley?*...

I know that the power of labor unions has declined. Still, I was astonished to learn from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service that work stoppages have declined from a high of 3,111 in 1977 to only 385 last year.

One reason for the loss of union clout is suggested by a recent article in *The New York Times*: Owners and managers are going to extraordinary lengths to prevent union organizing. The latest: Retailers have banned the Salvation Army's tinkling bells from shopping malls because they fear that union organizers will demand equal access....

When Colonel Oliver North passed along to his boss, Admiral John Poindexter, an offer from Manuel Noriega to "take care" of the Sandinista leaders in Nicaragua, the admiral replied, according to the new book of computer messages, *White House e-mail*:

"If he really has assets inside, it could be very helpful, but we can not (repeat not) get involved in any conspiracy on assassination. More sabotage would be another story."

The messages also reveal that when Oscar Arias, the president of Costa Rica who later won a Nobel Prize for his efforts to bring peace to Central America, was planning a press conference to denounce American use of a Costa Rican airstrip to aid the Nicaraguan contras, North threatened Arias with a cutoff of American aid unless the press conference was cancelled.

North wrote Poindexter: "I recognize that I was well beyond my charter in dealing w/ a head of state, but it seemed like the only thing I could do."...

Speaking of Fred Astaire, one of the few unmixed blessings of cable television is that it made my favorite Astaire movie—"Funny Face"—available again after the film had seemingly disappeared for almost 25 years. You can see it on AMC. Another favorite of mine, "Summertime"—that's the one in which Katherine Hepburn plays a lonely spinster who finds romance in Venice—also resurfaced on cable a few years ago after a similar long absence. You can see it on Bravo. It was directed by David Lean, by the way, and the shots of Venice are breathtakingly lovely....

The public schools are doing a dandy job, according to several new books and reports cited by Robert Samuelson in a recent *Newsweek* column. In many places, especially large cities, this is obviously untrue. America's promise of equal opportunity will not be realized until there is a dramatic improvement in these schools.

The voucher system is the favorite solution of the conservatives. These vouchers would permit parents to select the public or private school of their choice and give it their share of the tax revenue spent on schools. One objection to this proposal is why should the taxpayer subsidize the parents who want to use tax money to pay part of the $12,000 to $20,000 that elite private schools charge?

I have an answer to that problem: Why not issue vouchers that limit their use to schools that will accept the voucher as full payment? This would give inner-city kids the salvation option of transferring to good parochial schools. One such school in the Washington area charges just $1650 a year, less than a third of what the District of Columbia spends per pupil.

There would be no First Amendment problem with such a proposal since the voucher would be given to the student to select either a public or private school. This would be just what the G.I. Bill did with college tuition after

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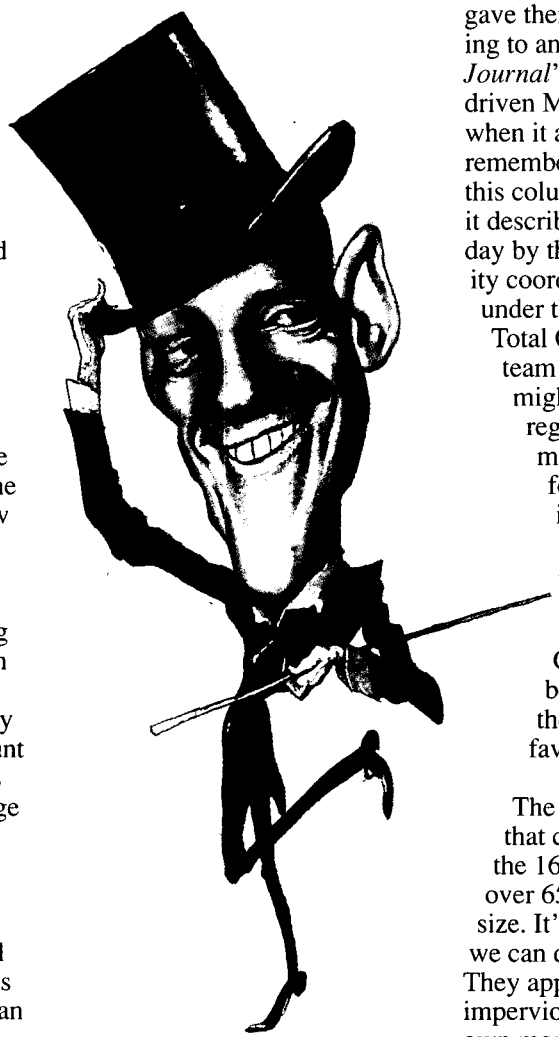
World War II. The only limit on the voucher's use would be monetary, not religious. Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Moslems, and non-sectarian groups would be free to organize schools good enough to attract parents with vouchers. But the beauty of the idea is that it offers immediate relief for deprived students in cities where there are good parochial schools....

During the December debate over the White House subpoena, Democratic senators seemed to have a point when they said something was terribly wrong with the majority's decision to devote only six hearings to Medicaid and only one to Medicare while devoting 34 to Whitewater. Constituents whose benefits are being reduced by the Republicans will doubtless view these numbers with interest....

Ethelred the Unready has long been one of my favorite English monarchs, so you can imagine my delight at the head that Mary McGrory placed over her account of Congresswoman Waldholtz's claim of innocence of knowledge of her husband's financial shenanigans: "Enid the Unwary."...

The United States has an annual mortality rate for kidney dialysis patients that is twice that of Japan and of several European countries, according to Kurt Eichenwald of *The New York Times*. One problem is that many of our dialysis companies pay their doctors with a share of the profits. The dialysis companies are paid a fixed amount per patient by the government. Every cent they save by not spending it on care contributes to the profits that they pay the doctors. So the doctors have an incentive to give inadequate care. The resulting complications for patients land them in the hospital. Does the dialysis company have to pay the hospital bill? Of course not. Medicare and



private insurers foot that bill while the dialysis companies pocket the profits....

You may recall that before Hazel O'Leary got into trouble for spending millions on chartering luxurious MGM-Grand jets for her travels abroad, she was in hot water for hiring a firm to evaluate news reports about the Department of Energy as to whether or not they were favorable or unfavorable. To top it all off, it turns out the evaluators didn't know what they were doing. For December 1994, they gave their highest favorable rating to an article by the *Wall Street Journal*'s Timothy Noah that had driven Mrs. O'Leary up the wall when it appeared. You may remember that I wrote about it in this column. Among other things, it described what was done all day by the two dozen "field quality coordinators" who worked under the DOE's Washington Total Quality Management team "reviewing plans that we might be working on with regard to quality. That might include a customer focus plan. It might include plans to get our strategic planning going on. It might include plans or obligations I have to the Quality Council." Can you believe that they really thought this story was favorable?...

The two groups of drivers that cause the most accidents, the 16-24 age group and those over 65, are both growing in size. It's hard to figure out what we can do about the teenagers: They appear to be absolutely impervious to intimations of their own mortality. We geezers, on the other hand, are well aware of these intimations. What we are less likely to face is our declining skills. So wouldn't it be a good idea to have our driving skills retested every four years or so, just as most states now require vision to be retested?...

One reason the District of Columbia is practically bankrupt

Roman Genn

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is that it has been run by incompetents for about 20 years. But another reason, as my friend and longtime District resident, Robert Keeley, recently reminded me, is that 57 percent of the city's real estate is exempt from taxation, and 66 percent of all income earned in the District goes to commuters who do not pay District income tax. And of course, we've learned, thanks to David Vise of *The Washington Post*, that Fannie Mae and Sallie Mae would be giving the District $340 million a year in income tax if they were required to pay income tax....

Instead of the Republican program of tax cuts to benefit the wealthy, I have two suggestions that will help the average man and produce the job growth needed so desperately by all the workers who are being laid off or fear they are next in line.

(1) Reduce the social security tax. It is bringing in more money than is needed to fund current social security benefits. It is also the tax that is the heaviest burden on the worker. And because employers have to pay part of it, it is a disincentive to hiring. An even better solution would be to eliminate the social security tax entirely and finance benefits through the income tax, meaning that the cost would be borne by those who can best afford to pay.

(2) Reduce the capital gains tax, but only for investment in new companies or new plants, the kind of investment that produces new jobs. Why waste tax breaks on the trading of existing issues, the only economic benefit of which is higher commissions for Wall Street brokerage firms? A targeted tax break would actually produce jobs. I would even favor total elimination of the capital gains tax on new investment. But, for heaven's sake, don't waste tax breaks on all those rich traders who don't give a damn about creating jobs....

I want to congratulate my old friend Joe Nocera for his piece in this issue. Joe says the Democrats must end their alliance with the teacher unions. I not only agree, I would add all public employees unions to the list—unless these unions are willing to abandon their defense of incompetent employees. We can't have good schools or good government until we can fire the people who aren't doing their jobs.

On the other hand, wouldn't it be wonderful if the unions could identify themselves with the best and most dedicated teachers and civil servants, encouraging others to follow the path of excellence, and expelling from their midst the untalented and the uncaring!...

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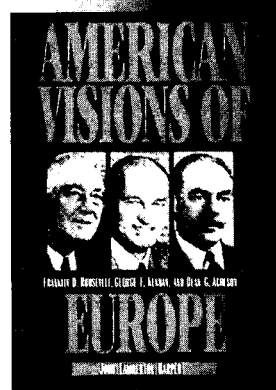

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A few weeks ago I saw the new movie "The American President" and was touched by its effort to restore respect for an institution that has for too long been treated with ridicule and contempt by far too many commentators. I applauded at the end as did many others in the audience.

But I was also depressed by the vision of liberalism that the movie offered. The big issue was gun control. I'm for gun control, too. But it's just not central to the liberalism I believe in. The heart of that liberalism is concerned with issues like health and education and jobs, with giving everyone a fair chance in life.

Instead of concentrating on these basic issues, too many liberals have devoted their major energies to causes like gun control, abortion rights, gay rights, and affirmative action. It is not that these causes do not deserve support. But something has gone badly wrong when they get all the attention. The movie, for example, doesn't even mention the need for good schools for each child, decent jobs for every adult, and quality medical care for all of us.

These great causes can unite all our citizens except perhaps the affluent elite who want to retain their leg up on everyone else. The problem with the other causes that have taken over liberalism in recent years is that they do not unite but divide. There are lots of good people who do believe they should be able to carry arms, who oppose abortion on demand, who do not want to encourage homosexuality, and who are convinced that affirmative action is unfair. Liberals may have to disagree with them. But they should not look down on them. A nasty "We're smarter than the vulgar mob" element has crept into the liberal mind. I think it began when we thought that we who supported Adlai Stevenson were brighter than the majority of Americans who supported Dwight Eisenhower. But however it started, it is bad. When we disagree with average Americans, we should do so respectfully. Above all we should seek to unite with them where we have common cause. And we should not forget that the most important causes of all are the ones we share....

—*Charles Peters*

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO LABOR LIBERALISM IN AMERICA?

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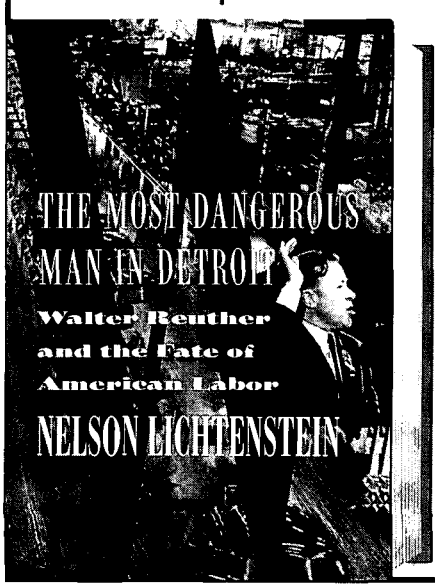

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INSIDE THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

When the Republicans began to talk about abolishing agencies like the Department of Commerce, a simple question occurred to us: Does anyone know what the Department of Commerce actually does? *The* Monthly *has long bemoaned the lack of information on the executive branch. This is where policy is supposed to be turned into action; yet the public knows very little about what happens there—about which agencies are doing useful work and which are wasting money.*

Almost no one in the federal government tries to answer these questions with comprehensive evaluations. The General Accounting Office (GAO) and the inspectors general usually focus on small slices of agency operations. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) spends the majority of its energy crunching budget numbers. When it does look at overall agency performance—which is not often or thoroughly enough, due to understaffing—it rarely shares its findings with the public.

Then there's the press. Perhaps because few reporters have experience working in the executive branch, the media seems lost in covering it. Indeed, with a few exceptions for national security agencies like the State Department and the Department of Defense, agencies get very little attention. The New York Times, *with a 79-person Washington bureau, doesn't have a single person assigned to regularly cover the Departments of Labor or Education.*

With this issue, the Monthly *inaugurates a series of articles intended to point the way towards constructive agency evaluation. We've begun with the FAA and the FDA—two agencies that, because they deal with life and death issues, have received more-than-average (if still fragmentary) attention. By pulling together the work of other reporters and of various government auditors, and by doing some digging of our own, we have tried to begin informing an understandably confused public. The crisis of confidence in our government is grave. But constructive evaluations show that our public institutions fail for reasons that can be understood and fixed.*

Our hope is that others will join the cause. If they do, some common problems will begin to emerge. In these two articles, for example, it is clear that conservative complaints about too much regulation are often off the mark; in many cases, the great problem is too little regulation. And once we identify not just the symptoms but the causes *of problems, we can start to have a real debate about how to solve them. So maybe the next time the Republicans propose abolishing the Department of Commerce, or Bill Clinton and Al Gore propose reinventing the government, we won't all be flying blind.*

—The Editors

Uncle Sam's Not-So-Friendly Skies

The FAA has a good safety record, but it could do much better

BY GARETH COOK

It was Halloween afternoon. The American Airlines commuter turbo-prop was circling at 10,000 feet waiting for permission to land at Chicago's O'Hare airport. In the cockpit, the pilots joked with each other while the autopilot held them on course. Outside, a cold rain streaked by.

After more than half an hour in the holding pattern, the airport radioed permission to descend to 8,000 feet in preparation for landing. The pilots adjusted for descent, retracting the wing's flaps.

That's when everything went wrong. The autopilot suddenly switched off. The plane tilted violently to the right, the wings almost perpendicular to the horizon. The pilots wrestled for control, trying to bring the craft back to level flight. But the plane seemed to have a mind of its own: It turned over on its back and rushed for the ground.

"Mellow it out. ... Mellow it out ... nice and easy," the pilot said; then came a crunching sound as the plane fell apart at upwards of 400 miles per hour, moments before it smashed into a soybean field outside Roselawn, Illinois. Everyone—64 passengers and four crew—was dead.

Because of accidents like the one in Roselawn,

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the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is one of the few agencies within the executive branch that draws much attention from the press. When a plane falls from the sky, the story is compelling, albeit morbidly so: the pictures of twisted metal, luggage hanging from trees, the screaming mother at the airport where the flight never arrives. And because Roselawn was only one of a series of serious air accidents in 1994, Americans were becoming wary of flying. The press, as a result, took an interest in finding out what was happening.

The string of reports on the FAA proves that the media can do a far better job than it has been doing to explain what actually goes on in government. Indeed, when reporters probe the executive branch with the right questions, the answers can amaze, infuriate—and even reassure. It's not hard—just by putting some of these stories together and doing a little digging, I've been able to answer at least some of the public's questions: How well is the FAA, on balance, doing its job to prevent any air accidents? And how can it do better?

Setting Course

The United States could not function as a modern economy without the air links that the FAA oversees. If moving one ton of freight one mile is a "ton mile," U.S. airlines move more than 14 billion ton miles annually, as well as another 2 billion ton miles of mail. The industry also moves an enormous number of people—upwards of 550 million last year alone. Preventing accidents is also a high-stakes venture: Just one accident, the 1989 crash of a DC-10 in Sioux City, Iowa, killed 112 people and cost some $300 million.

With a $4.6 billion annual budget and 48,000 employees, it is the charge of the FAA to make sure that the system functions efficiently and safely. Yet this is a difficult time for the agency. Like much of government in this era of "downsizing" and "reinvention," the FAA faces ever-smaller budgets and increasing responsibilities. By 2006, the number of airline passengers in this country is projected to hit 930 million a year, an increase of 70 percent. At the same time, the FAA has faced sharp attack from critics who contend it's neither as effective nor as efficient as it should be; several bills to reform the agency wholesale are snaking their way through Congress—and some have even suggested privatizing the entire agency. In response, David Hinson, the agency's tough new administrator, is trying to get a handle on billions of dollars of waste and, above all, to aggressively pursue safety. The agency, in other words, is in the midst of a mini-revolution.

While Congress debates seemingly arcane matters like changing the FAA's procurement rules, and as Hinson promises to change the "culture" of the FAA, journalists need to keep an eye on the ball. "It may seem amazing to say, but like many big organizations, [the government] is primarily dominated by considerations of input—how much money do we spend on a program, how many people do you have on staff, what kind of regulations and rules are going to govern it; and much less on output—does it work, is it changing people's lives for the better?" For the press, this means focusing on how well the FAA does its three most important tasks: developing new safety rules, making sure that the rules are actually being followed, and directing the nation's air traffic.

It's ironic that, at a time when Washington is filled with outcry over excessive regulation, one of the FAA's problems is its reluctance to issue new—and possibly life-saving—regulations.

Consider the example of the Ground Proximity Warning System (GPWS), recently recounted by Jeff Brazil in the *Los Angeles Times*. The GPWS is a relatively simple device that warns the pilot if the plane is close to the ground. The FAA began requiring the GPWS in all of the larger passenger planes after two particularly bad accidents—an Eastern Airlines L-1011 that sloped into the Florida Everglades and a TWA Boeing 727 that slammed into a mountain while approaching Dulles—that together killed 191 people.

But while common sense might suggest that smaller commuter planes should also carry a GPWS—after all, they run the same risk of crashing—the FAA didn't act. By 1986 it was clear that this was a mistake. A study conducted by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), an independent government agency that investigates accidents on highways, on railroads, and in the air, found that after the GPWS systems were put into larger planes, "controlled flight into terrain" accidents (as they are dryly called) dropped by 75 percent. Even more to the point, the report concluded that three recent commuter crashes, responsible for 25 deaths, easily could have been prevented if the devices had been installed.

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Still, the FAA didn't move—and the crashes continued. In January 1988, a commuter plane slammed into a Colorado ridge, killing nine. The next month, another commuter crashed, killing 12. That fall, according to *L.A. Times* reporter Brazil, an internal FAA memo concluded that, of 280 commuter crashes between 1972 and 1985, 60 crashes might have been avoided with the GPWS. Not until April 1990, though, did the FAA say that it intended to require them in smaller planes. Then it gave the airlines two years to comply. "For every six months we delay the GPWS, we can expect an accident," wrote an FAA official in another memo Brazil uncovered. Indeed, four months before the deadline, another 18 died.

"I have personally watched an FAA inspector do a ramp check of an airplane and walk by two major violations," says one former mechanic.

For an outsider, such sluggishness by an agency ostensibly created to protect public safety is downright baffling. Part of the explanation lies in the FAA's mission or, rather, its dual mission. The legislation that set up the agency mandated that the FAA not only regulate the airlines to ensure the safety of the flying public, but that it also promote the aviation industry. If these two goals sound contradictory, that's because they are, and too often, the instinct to help the airlines—or, in the soft-pedaled jargon of the beltway, to "be sensitive to their concerns"—has softened the FAA's resolve to protect safety.

Recently, for example, the FAA was trying to decide whether to take action on the Boeing 757, which, like many large planes, leaves a vortex in its wake that can endanger smaller planes trailing behind. Two accidents and 13 deaths had already been linked to the problem. Why would the FAA even think twice about taking action? Well, the *L.A. Times*'s Brazil uncovered a memo that listed an unusual item among the reasons for not aggressively pursuing the safety problem: worry about damaging the public's perception of Boeing. That's kind of like not removing E. coli-tainted beef from Jack-In-The-Box because cheeseburger sales might drop.

Usually the reasons for the FAA's laggardness are more subtle. Before the FAA can issue a new regulation, the law requires the FAA to show that the benefits (in lives saved, equipment not damaged, etc.) will outweigh the costs of complying. There is nothing wrong with this in theory, but in practice it is abused. "Those who are affected by any recommendations often hide behind the cost considerations," explains NTSB board member John Goglia, a gregarious former aircraft mechanic who doesn't pull punches. "They're very good at making sure that any and all direct and indirect costs ... get included." If the industry can show a change will cost too much, there's no change.

The FAA's conflicted identity contrasts sharply with that of the NTSB. Step into the NTSB lobby near the Mall in Washington, DC, and their single-minded purpose—to stop accidents from happening—is obvious. On the walls is a dramatic collection of accident photographs: U.S. Air Flight 5050, which took a slide off the end of the La Guardia runway; the tail of a small plane protruding from the second floor of a suburban home; even the distinctive smoke trails of the Space Shuttle Challenger accident.

The NTSB's simple mandate is to find out why accidents like these happened and to determine how they can be prevented in the future. The agency is small, with only 350 employees and a $38 million budget—"enough to run the [Department of Transportation] for about eight hours," jokes Chairman James Hall.

Yet it is extremely effective; over the years, its public bullying has prodded the FAA to make a host of important safety changes. "It's not that these guys are corrupt," says former NTSB Chairman James Burnett of FAA officials. "But a lot of them come from industry ... and a lot of them contemplate going back to industry ... which can make them a little more conservative."

Another problem, says Hall, is that too often it takes an accident to spur the FAA to fix problems: As early as the 1970s, safety critics began urging the FAA to do something about the problem of "runway incursions," accidents caused when a plane, or even a service vehicle, wanders onto an active runway. One report counted 1,210 near-collisions on runways between May 1978 and September 1983. In February 1991, U.S. Air

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Flight 1493 landed on top of a Skywest commuter plane at Los Angeles International Airport, killing 34 people. It was the third fatal runway collision in 13 months. Yet the FAA has been slow to respond. The ASDE-3 radar, a system to warn controllers of possible problems, has experienced significant delays. Twenty-one radar systems were promised by 1990. Now 1996 is the target.

• The NTSB has been lobbying the FAA for years to require more sophisticated "black boxes" in planes. The boxes (which are actually orange) record a plane's vital signs: airspeed, velocity, the positions of its various controls, etc. The older boxes record only the most rudimentary information, while the newer ones record more than 100 separate pieces of information, making it much easier to determine the cause of accidents and prevent future ones. For example, two Boeing 737s have mysteriously crashed recently. There may be a design flaw in the plane's tail which causes the pilot to lose control of the rudder—if true, a serious design flaw. Yet the two flight recorders were of an older design, so investigators cannot say for sure.

• The NTSB has had to constantly prod the FAA to redouble its efforts to keep bad pilots out of the cockpit. Alcohol and drug abuse is a real problem. One pilot who was found dead at the controls of a plane that crashed had a blood alcohol level of .16 percent, the rough equivalent of downing seven drinks in an hour. Despite incidents like these, it took years of prodding before the FAA took even the simple step of checking to see if pilots had lost their driver's licenses for driving while intoxicated.

The FAA has been—and continues to be—even more remiss in keeping unqualified pilots out of the cockpit. A number of planes have crashed due to pilots who were documented incompetents, most recently in North Carolina where 13 people were killed. For years the safety critics have lobbied the FAA to require that detailed personnel files be available to potential employers, but the agency has resisted, insisting that such a mandate would cause legal problems or violate pilots' right to privacy. What about the public's right to safety?

Beyond these specific problems, critics have urged the FAA, in the words of one recent GAO report, to take steps to "expand the margin of safety by being more proactive." The NTSB and others, for example, have suggested that the FAA systematically check flight data recorders—not just after an accident—to uncover problems with the planes' or pilots' performance. In Europe, checking the tapes is standard procedure. In the U.S., however, the pilots' unions have objected to such preventive investigation because they fear the information will be used against them. The FAA says it is still working on a compromise.

Being There

The FAA's job does not end with passing safety regulations, though. It must also enforce them. It is this area—making sure that the rules passed in Washington actually work in the field—that government agencies and the press are most likely to overlook. We've paid billions of dollars to bail out failed savings and loans, for example, not only because the government deregulated the industry, but because the agencies responsible for overseeing the S&Ls stopped monitoring what was happening outside Washington.

Keeping an eye on what's happening in the field is especially important for the FAA, particularly since the airline industry deregulation of 1978. In the old days, competition was tightly limited, which made the industry stable if not necessarily efficient. Since deregulation, however, competition has become far more cut-throat; old carriers go bankrupt, and new carriers start up every year. Such keen competition can tempt some carriers—especially upstarts—to cut corners on safety. Although the industry's overall safety record has continued to improve over the past two decades, deregulation has put more pressure on the FAA and its inspectors. "It's like a basketball game when you've suddenly got these two aggressive teams," says former NTSB chairman Burnett. "You've got to call it a lot closer."

The problem is that the FAA's referees haven't always been at the game. Consider the program for "designated mechanics examiners." To work on aircraft, a mechanic must be certified. Because there are so many mechanics who need to take this test, the FAA "designates" some mechanics, giving them the authority to test the others. But when the DOT's Office of Inspector General looked into the program, it found that the FAA was not keeping an eye on the examiners. And, like a kid given the key to the candy store, they

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were letting all their friends in: 99 percent of everyone who took the test passed.

Perhaps, you might object, 99 percent *deserved* to pass. But when someone from the inspector general's office sat in on the testing, the pass rate dropped to 58 percent. When an FAA official sat in as well, the pass rate dropped to 40 percent. Goglia sees this incident as representative of a broader problem—FAA inspectors just aren't in the field enough. "When I first came into the business in the early sixties, you always saw the inspectors. Twenty years later, you can go for months and months without seeing them."

Part of the problem, inspectors say, is an increase in paperwork, which keeps them in the office. There is also another classic bureaucratic problem: Middle management has swelled at the expense of actual employees in the field. According to the Office of Personnel Management, there is one manager for every six employees at the FAA, compared to a government-wide average of close to eight. (And the government-wide average leaves plenty to be desired.) The inspectors also complain that they are tied to the office because they have inadequate clerical support. "The FAA took a big hit in the downsizing, and a lot of the people were clerical workers," says Rep. James L. Oberstar (D-Minn.), the former chairman of the aviation subcommittee and a longtime air safety expert.

Being on-site is valuable not just because of problems inspectors might discover. Their mere presence inspires—or frightens—airline personnel to stay on their toes. "If you are around—and everyone knows you're around—it has an impact," says the NTSB's Goglia. With inspectors stuck in the office, not only do the airline workers have a tendency to get sloppy, but the inspectors themselves lose their eye. "I have personally watched an FAA inspector do a ramp check of an airplane and walk by two major violations," Goglia says. One violation—using flexible instead of steel tubing inside the wheel well—could have caused a dangerous fire. Inspectors don't just have to be there; they have to know what to look for."

Inspectors complain—and a number of auditors have confirmed—that they are not adequately prepared for their job and do not get enough training to keep them "current." According to a story by Adam Bryant in *The New York Times*, only four percent of inspectors of the ATR commuter plane, the one that crashed in Roselawn, were fully qualified to fly the planes themselves, which makes it pretty hard to determine what might go wrong during a flight. According to Bryant's story, the poor training of some FAA inspectors has contributed to several accidents. For example, after a Northwest Airlink turbo-prop crashed in December 1993, NTSB investigators found that the FAA's principal operations inspector did not have any experience flying the planes Airlink used. Similarly, after a September 1985 crash of a Midwest Express DC-9 in which 31 people died, the NTSB found that the principal operations inspector had *no* experience with jet aircraft. The problem is not a simple lack of money: According to the GAO, the FAA did not even fill all of its training slots last year.

Another problem in the field, where the dictates of the home office ought to be turned into action, is a lack of accountability. Most of the FAA's employees are hard-working, intelligent, and dedicated. But lax standards in some areas hurt agency performance and worker morale. Consider, for example, a harrowing story in Bryant's piece in *The New York Times*. Earlier this year, the FAA found a laundry list of safety violations at Arrow Air, a Miami-based charter company with a checkered past (including a 1985 crash in Newfoundland that killed hundreds of Americans heading home for the holidays). The violations included an out-of-date training manual, tools that were missing or improperly calibrated, and planes being okayed to fly without having made safety modifications the FAA had ordered.

Arrow was shut down for more than two months. Since the inspectors had either knowingly ignored or just missed these egregious and dangerous violations, they should have been fired or at the least retrained. Instead, they were merely reassigned.

Then there was the long report a FAA researcher wrote warning about metal fatigue. "It is possible for a number of cracks, each not easily inspected, to suddenly join together and form a long critical crack," the report read. "A number of fleets are currently operating at double their initially anticipated design life goals." Well after the report, as the *L.A. Times* recounted, the top half of a Boeing 737 ripped off over Hawaii—because of metal fatigue. There is, a DOT Inspector General report concluded, "no formal system ... to ensure

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Tidbits & Outrages

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Robert Citron, the treasurer of Orange County, California who lost $1.7 billion of taxpayer money in shoddy investments, has asked to be reimbursed for $4,555.70 in unused vacation time. He currently receives a $90,000 annual pension.

NEXT: FRACTIONS AND FRAUD
A new series of educational CD-ROMs will feature Michael Milken playing a character called "the wizard." The first of the series, "Decimals and Dragons," will be in the stores by next Christmas.

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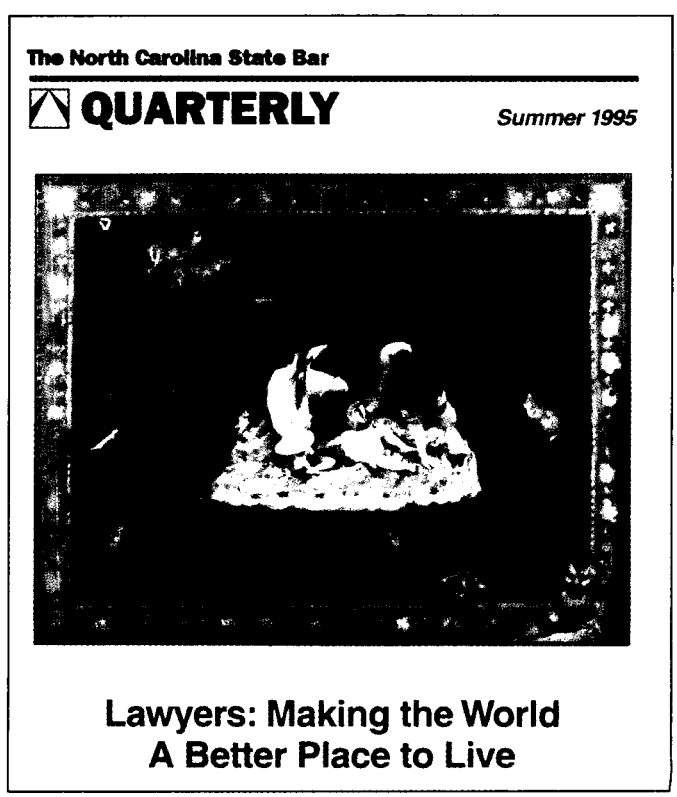
I SEE IT NOW ... IN A FIVE-SIDED BUILDING ... THERE'S A HUGE WASTE OF MONEY
The Pentagon has spent $20 million over the last two decades using "psychics" to describe buildings in Libya and spot targets in North Korea, among other assignments. The project grew from worries that the Soviet Union was far ahead in using extrasensory perception—an "ESP gap."

IF ONLY IT WERE JUST A GAME
A company under license of Parker Brothers will issue a Washington version of the popular board game Monopoly. "Game players," *The Washington Post* reports, "can now buy Capitol Hill or the White House."

AND THE 1996 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE GOES TO ... JOHNNIE COCHRAN



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aircraft problems do not fall into a 'black hole'."

Some black holes develop because employees in the field don't want to upset the status quo. Recently, mechanics for a major carrier looked at a 727 flap track, a device that holds one of the plane's control surfaces, which had arrived labeled ready-to-install. But the flap track was covered with corrosion pits and other visible problems. Outraged that a repair station would okay the part, the mechanics called in an FAA investigator. He nodded in agreement at the obvious problems, but when the mechanics asked what he was going to do, he said "nothing." The frustrated mechanics then called the FAA's regional flight standards office, but it, too, refused to act. That kind of response is "typical," says Goglia, "I've seen it over and over."

Another place accountability can break down is in the air traffic control tower. Air traffic controllers guide thousands of planes through crowded airspace, often under perilous conditions, so it's understandable that they are supposed to stay on top of the latest rules and developments by reading a "read and initial" folder. But controllers are never tested on it; that's why some jokingly refer to it as the "read and ignore" folder.

Directing Traffic

There's no question that ensuring orderly air traffic is one of the FAA's most critical services to the public. It's hard not to be impressed by the scene in a tower like the one at Washington's National Airport. Behind several sets of electronically locked steel doors, controllers with radio headsets peer out the thick, angled windows of the tower, directing a carefully orchestrated dance of landings and take-offs across three runways. And while their success often goes unnoticed, it is quite remarkable: This tower alone handles 1,000 take-offs and landings a day; the system nationwide handles 58 million operations a year.

But the record's not perfect. The major problem, as any controller can tell you, is that the FAA has done a terrible job updating the system. At a press conference, President Clinton held up a vacuum tube that looked as if it came from a sci-fi set: "We actually have to buy these vacuum tubes for [the FAA's] old computers and radar systems from other countries because they're not even produced here any more." Not surprisingly, these ancient computers have been breaking down. The computers have crashed at Dallas-Fort Worth, Oakland, and other big city airports. At Chicago, the main computer once went out for a full 29 hours.

In the Washington tower, one of the controllers showed me what happens when the computer fails. One minute, you see a radar scope with each plane identified by flight number, altitude, airspeed, and so on. Suddenly, all the identifying information drops off; the screen is filled with little green spots. The controllers are trained to work without the computers, and there have not been any accidents. But after at least one breakdown, shaken controllers told NTSB investigators they did not feel they were trained well enough.

It's not that the FAA hasn't tried to upgrade —it's been trying since 1981. A new system was supposed to be in place in 1992; the most recent estimate is 2002—or later. And not only are we stuck with the old system until the 21st century, the project is also billions of dollars over budget. Fortunately, FAA administrator Hinson has shown signs of getting a handle on the problems. Instead of following the usual pattern—making an already unrealistic project even more ambitious—Hinson has downscaled the upgrade to its bare essentials. He has also chosen strong, able managers and delegated the authority to keep the project in line. "It does seem to be back on track," says Oberstar, "and Hinson deserves full credit for that." The first step to improving the agency's operations—putting capable, committed people in charge—seems to have been taken.

In the long term, though, the FAA will not be able to keep its air traffic system up-to-date—and safe—without more basic changes. A confusing array of reform proposals is making the rounds in Washington, from privatization to simply removing the FAA from under the purview of the Department of Transportation, but the smart ones share three basic principles: First, keep the agency a government entity. Letting the airlines handle their own air traffic control would be like letting Johnson & Johnson control drug regulation.

Second, change the antiquated and cumbersome procurement rules that have obstructed efforts to purchase up-to-date equipment. The FAA should be able to run its finances more like a business: It should be able to make smart capital investments up front, rather than fighting with

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Congress over its budget every year. It also should be able to buy good products off the shelf without a tangle of paperwork.

Third, make the agency's leadership more stable. As it is, the administrator has changed every two years or so, and every new crop of political appointees has tried to start from scratch. Administrators need to be there long enough to hold their own in highly technical debates, not just long enough to cash in on a terrific résumé builder. Hinson plans on serving for five years; some even think that the term should be seven years long.

But while these changes are important, they do not address the most fundamental question: What is the *mission* of the FAA? To be truly effective, an organization must have a clear sense of what it is trying to accomplish. Consider the case of NASA in the 1960s. President Kennedy told them to put a man on the moon, and bring him back safely, by the end of the decade. So that's what they did. In the case of the FAA, it seems pretty clear that it should drop "promoting aviation" from its mandate. Why does the aircraft industry need any special help? Instead, the FAA's mission should be simple and straightforward: to do everything in its power to make flying in this country as safe as reasonably possible.

Hinson, to his credit, is trying to move the FAA in this direction. In December, he announced that the FAA was issuing a regulation that will hold commuter airlines to the same safety standards as larger aircraft. Before Hinson, this critical change —a long-time demand of safety critics—had been the subject of enormous resistance from the industry, and, accordingly, from the FAA. Hinson also recently led a follow-up meeting on a "safety summit" held last year, even though the public's sense of emergency has passed. Hinson's relationship with the NTSB is better than in past administrations; he has a better record of accepting NTSB recommendations. And the rough draft of the 1996 FAA "Strategic Plan" goes out of its way to emphasize that safety is the priority.

More importantly, Hinson has put Chris Hardt, a well-respected safety expert and former NTSB board member, in charge of a safety office that reports *directly* to Hinson. The move is essential because it will give him the power to call the administrator's attention to problems that, in the past, have been buried in the FAA's bureaucracy.

Sometimes, though, it's not the FAA's bureaucracy that is at fault; it's the rest of the government's. Even after the FAA has decided it would like to issue a new safety regulation, it must undergo a tortuous approval process. The proposed regulation moves, as slowly as molasses, from the FAA, to the Department of Transportation, to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), then back to the DOT and, finally, back to the FAA. At any point it can be derailed, or sent back to the beginning—the federal government's version of Monopoly's "Return to Go." "There are twelve levels of sign-offs," Rep. Oberstar complains. "That's far too much."

How do we speed up the approval process? Well, that's an ideal story for a reporter who wants to investigate how to improve the FAA. There are plenty of other stories:

•To have a good organization, inside or outside the government, you need good people. One GAO report voiced concerns over the FAA's ability to attract talented people in high-tech fields. That's worth investigating and so is the broader question: How good is the FAA at recruiting good people? And does it inspire them to stay?

•After many years of steady decline, the accident rate for private pilots started to climb in 1990. It has been climbing ever since. Why? There is little to prevent a pilot from flying drunk, and, often enough, they do not even have to file a flight plan. General aviation does not get much critical attention—until, that is, some pilot takes to the air reeking of bourbon and then dumps his Cessna into somebody's living room. Has anyone considered spot checks, just like drunk driver road-blocks? (One can't help but wonder if the power of the private pilots' lobby—pilots tend to be a wealthy, influential lot—has something to do with the lax standards.)

The challenge of journalism is to find important stories like these and make them interesting. Send a good reporter into the Department of Education, for example, and find out what they are actually doing. Is the Department making schools better? Are the schools making good citizens? (Local papers, which dutifully record every school board meeting but almost never walk into a classroom, would do well to get into the act too.) If the government is doing a terrible job, you've got a dramatic story. And if it is doing a good job, then you have an uplifting one. Either way, you have a story that matters. □

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WARNING: Cutting the FDA Could Be Hazardous to Your Health

The right-wing's attack is mostly bunk. But the agency could be improved

BY JOSHUA WOLF SHENK

It was the first time Don Vasbinder had seen a body in a bag of cocoa beans. In late 1993, inspectors from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) sniffed something wrong in a shipment of beans from Brazil. Inside, they found a rotting corpse. "That was a first for me," says Vasbinder, the director of imports for the Baltimore district office of the FDA. "But the old-time food inspectors say that's not uncommon. In fact, they found another body shortly thereafter in Philadelphia."

If Vasbinder, a slight man with big block glasses and a Ph.D. in chemistry, is unfazed by this story, it's because in his 20 years with the FDA he has seen just about everything. Rusted surgical knives. Rotted mud fish from Singapore. Condoms with holes in them. And those are just the imports. Including the multi-billion dollar domestic market in pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and food, the FDA regulates products that account for 25 cents of every dollar spent in this country. A tour of FDA facilities in Baltimore, where scores of inspectors and scientists are only a small part of the 9,000-person, $980 million agency, yields a quick understanding of the FDA's importance: In the pesticide group, chemists have found dangerous levels of DDT in grain intended for breakfast cereal. In the drug lab, chemists have caught at-home tests for pregnancy and glucose that do not work as claimed. Stories of impure food and drugs—laced with unsafe chemicals, insect parts, rusted metal, even cigarette butts—are common.

Of course, as inspector Dean Cook points out while we walk through a spice plant filled to the roof with sacks of cola nuts, black pepper, and oregano, the vast majority of the goods he checks are safe. Reviewers of drugs and medical devices at FDA headquarters in Rockville, Maryland also attest that most manufacturers want to make money by producing good products, not by scamming the system. But it is equally obvious that bad apples (so to speak) abound, both in this country and abroad. Keeping the food supply clean and the marketplace of drugs and medical devices safe and effective often takes more than a strong sense of smell. With chemical compounds and complicated medical devices, it takes years of careful study.

It is this studiousness and circumspection that rankle the agency's critics. In Congress, the same coalition that slashed the budget of the Environmental Protection Agency and pushed a moratorium on all new federal regulations is setting its sights on the FDA. It's a matter of jobs, Newt Gingrich explains, arguing that FDA overregulation is squelching industry and stifling economic growth. Shortly after his inauguration as speaker, Gingrich called the FDA the country's "leading job killer." And in a recent speech before health insurers, he said that in "phase three" of his revolution, "Maybe we'll take out FDA."

At Gingrich's flank is a cadre of conservative activists in Washington. The Washington Legal Foundation is running ads in major newspapers proclaiming "If a murderer kills you, it's homicide.... If FDA kills you, it's merely being cautious." The Progress and Freedom Foundation is proposing that drug and device approval be farmed out to private research groups or universities. Sam Kazman of the Competitive Enterprise Institute would remove the FDA's "monopoly," meaning that the agency would continue to operate but couldn't keep goods off the market. These groups happen to receive generous donations from the

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pharmaceutical and medical device industry as well as tobacco companies frightened of the FDA's proposal to regulate cigarette marketing to children.

The FDA has always been controversial. Industry lobbied hard against the original Food and Drug Act in 1906, and the agency has been granted more power only when scandals shocked Congress into action. In 1996, though, the agency's waters are particularly choppy. Besides Republican hostility, the FDA also faces pressure to move more quickly from liberals in Congress such as Representative Ron Wyden and Senator Barbara Mikulski.

With the FDA's very existence called into question, you might expect the Washington press corps, congressional auditors, and the executive branch to be scrambling to evaluate the agency. In what way are the critics correct? What are the FDA's strong suits? What is the agency trying to do—and what is it actually doing where the rubber meets the road (or where the tablet meets the mouth)?

In a town often scandalously blithe about matters vital to the lives of Americans, the FDA has gotten no such treatment. The watchdogs are napping. If they woke up, they'd find an agency with a clear mission, dedicated staff and leadership, and the best safety record and reputation of any health agency in the world—an agency that is often wrongly maligned. The FDA isn't perfect, and its imperfections aren't pretty. But only through tough, fair scrutiny and analysis, of which this piece is a modest effort, can it be improved.

Drugstore Cowboys

The purpose of a business is simple: to provide a desired good or service and make a profit. In government, purpose is sometimes more difficult to discern. What is an agency's mission? In what way does it improve citizens' lives?

FDA Commissioner David Kessler sums up the FDA's mission in three words: "safeguarding America's health." More specifically, the FDA ensures the safety of the nation's supply of food, drugs, medical devices, and other health-related material, such as cosmetics, devices that emit radiation (like TVs and microwaves), and the blood supply. With drugs and devices, the FDA goes one step further and checks to make sure products work for the purpose claimed by the manufacturer. The logic is simple: While protections against egregious fraud are important in any industry, ineffective health-care products pose a particular risk. If a lamp doesn't work, you can take it back to the store and buy another one. But a pacemaker that doesn't work could kill you.

The clear sense of mission—the knowledge that their work can literally be the difference between life and death—infuses the agency with energy. "The FDA has way more than its share of bright, dedicated, competent people," says William Vodra, who worked for the agency's general counsel in the 1970s. "We would have discussions all the time, and ultimately someone would ask: 'Okay, what's in the public interest here?' On Capitol Hill, you never hear issues framed that way." Even critics, like Richard Samp of the Washington Legal Foundation, praise FDA staffers. "I'm generally impressed by their intelligence and public spiritedness," Samp says. "These people don't sit around dawdling in their offices, turning around paperwork all day."

In addition to the widespread acclaim for FDA employees, the agency's basic mission is affirmed by supporters and critics alike. Gingrich's blustering aside, there is widespread agreement that the FDA should remain, in Samp's words, "a centralized government bureaucracy providing an official stamp of approval that a product is certified as safe, based on the best available technology."

The issue with the FDA, then, is not what it should do—the question is how it does what it does. Like all regulatory agencies, the FDA faces the challenge of protecting the public without suffocating commerce. With drugs and medical devices, it faces an additional, more delicate, task: The FDA must protect the public from hazards without holding up useful treatments—keeping a life-saving drug off the market can be as lethal as allowing a flawed drug to go forward.

The famous case of Dr. Frances Kelsey illustrates the tricky business of regulating health products. Between 1959 and 1961, thousands of babies in 20 countries were born with grievous deformities because their mothers had taken a new sedative called thalidomide during pregnancy. In the United States, the drug had never been marketed because Kelsey, the medical officer in charge of the application, had held it up.

Clearly, Kelsey made a huge save. And conscientious work like hers has made FDA approval the worldwide "gold-standard" for medical products.

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According to a study by Dr. Sidney Wolfe at the Health Research Group of Public Citizen, this country only had to recall 9 drugs between 1970 and 1992. Over that same period in France there were 31 recalls; in Germany, 30; in Britain, 23.

But Kelsey's legacy has another side: According to close watchers of the FDA, she was known for being slow and ponderous—sometimes to excess. We know about the tragedy she stopped. But could she have caused a tragedy by scuttling beneficial new therapies? That question cuts to the heart of the FDA.

Among critics, it is an article of faith that the FDA is slow and getting slower. A commonly-cited Tufts University study shows that the average time required to bring new medicines to market in this country has increased from about eight to 15 years since the early 1960s. It's true that the FDA can be guilty of excessive caution, particularly when keeping a product off the market because they're not 100 percent sure it works. Reviewers have an incentive to err on the side of caution: If they let a bad drug get through, they face a rain of humiliation. If a good drug is stopped or unduly delayed, the only complaints come from industry.

Still, in context, the data cited by critics do not indicate an agency in crisis. Every decade or so, a defective medical product slaps Americans in the face and reminds this country of the necessity of thorough reviews. In 1962, it was thalidomide —which, along with earlier scandals, led Congress to require the FDA to check for the efficacy as well as the safety of drugs. In 1976, it was the Dalkon Shield—an intrauterine device that caused 18 deaths and 66,000 miscarriages and led to FDA regulation of medical devices. In the late eighties came another series of scandals involving heart valves, jaw implants, and breast implants, among others. The resulting clampdown on devices led to a backlog in the early 1990s.

The Tufts study is not inaccurate; it does take longer to develop a drug now than in 1960. But the FDA rightfully is being more cautious than it was in 1960. It is also crucial when assessing the FDA's speed to distinguish between drugs and devices that truly improve on existing therapies, and those that replicate other products or add the chemical or engineering equivalent of a new bell or whistle. "If you're a drug company," explains Sidney Wolfe, "and you see a lucrative $4 billion market for a drug that treats arthritis and it's nothing really new, but you can repackage it as something radically new, then you're going to go for it." According to the London journal *SCRIP*, of 47 new chemical entities introduced in the world between January 1 and December 8, 1994, only two were breakthroughs. Both were first approved and marketed in the United States. Remember the drugs recalled in Europe but never introduced here? Not one had shown a significant advance over existing therapies. In other words, it's not safe to assume that holding up a drug or medical device means lost lives.

But some FDA-regulated products *are* breakthroughs. The challenge for the agency, then, is to maximize its speed without sacrificing its standards. And according to a recent GAO report, the agency actually has made great strides in its review speed. In 1987, the average review time for a New Drug Application—submitted after a drug has been fully tested in human subjects—took an average of 33 months; in 1992, the average was 19 months. This study also found the FDA to be quicker than the British Medicines Control Agency, to which critics often unfavorably compare the FDA.

When it comes to reviewing products that are, in fact, significant advances, the FDA has a good history; it has even improved in recent years. The agency correctly employs triage—assigning priority to products depending on the seriousness of the illness to be treated and the availability of other therapies. AZT, one of the few drugs available to fight AIDS and HIV, was approved in just a few months. Much of the improvement in review times is due to the institution of user fees for drug applications. Just as college applicants pay a fee to have their applications reviewed, drug companies now pay to have their data analyzed and methods reviewed. The FDA uses the funds to augment its staff, which leads to a quicker turnaround time.

Certainly the FDA could improve. It has, for example, a lackluster history with generic drugs, which are radically less expensive than patented drugs and can save consumers thousands of dollars in drug costs. With exploding health-care costs, it makes sense to push generics through as fast as possible. But for years, the pharmaceutical industry pressured the FDA to preserve the industry's competitive edge by holding up generics. The agency obliged, insisting, for example, that a generic undergo the same testing as a new drug, even though it might be identical to a drug already on the mar-

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The Washington Monthly

JOURNALISM AWARD

OCTOBER 1995

George C. Wilson & Peter Carlson
The Washington Post Magazine

Wilson and Carlson scrupulously document the tarnished history of the U.S. Navy's A-12 Avenger, a state-of-the-art stealth bomber that was at least a billion dollars over budget and a year behind schedule when then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney scrapped it in 1991. The project, along with the ensuing legal battle between the contractors and the government, may ultimately cost taxpayers $5 billion.

Jorge Oclander
Chicago Sun Times

In a revealing two-part exposé, Oclander looks at the infiltration of the Chicago Police Department by local gangs, whose loyalty is not to the community but to their respective organizations. Constitutional rights protecting freedom of association are undercutting efforts to combat this problem.

Katherine Boo
The Washington Post

In a meticulously reported and movingly written story, Boo follows D.C. social worker Darryl Wilson, part of a D.C. government "family preservation" team, as he heroically tries to keep one dispirited family whole without allowing the children within it to be destroyed.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to one or more newspaper, magazine, radio, or television stories (or series of stories) that demonstrate a commitment to the public interest. We are particularly interested in reporting that explains the successes and failures of government agencies at all levels and of other institutions such as the media, corporations, unions, and foundations that contribute to the existence or solution of public problems. Please send nominations (including two copies of the article or broadcast text) to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009. Nominations for stories run in January are due February 10.

ket. That practice was changed in 1985, when generics accounted for only 14 percent of prescriptions written. Today, they account for 45 percent, and the FDA now allows generics on the market the day a patent expires. But Congress hasn't granted the agency the authority to charge user fees to test generic drugs, and so it has insufficient resources to review them; that means useful and more affordable generics aren't making it onto the market. Whether through user fees or standard appropriation, the FDA's budget needs to match its responsibilities.

And unlike its stellar record on safety, the FDA's record regulating product efficacy—something it's been doing only since 1962—is spotty. Too often, the agency takes an all-or-nothing approach: A drug is either fully approved for safety and efficacy, or it is kept out of patients' hands entirely. Once a breakthrough drug has been proven safe, there's no reason why people shouldn't be able to use it—assuming they're fully informed that the FDA has yet to certify the drug's effectiveness. Along these same lines, compassionate use—exemption from FDA rules due to a clear and pressing need—should also be expanded. Denying dying patients a drug because it might hurt them is clearly a fool's bargain.

On the whole, though, the FDA's record on drug reviews is good. The story with medical devices is somewhat more complicated. Rhetorical fireworks from agency critics have largely centered around devices, in part due to the fact that, unlike drugs, devices tend to be made by small entrepreneurs. A "no" from the FDA—or a delay in approval—can mean the end of a company.

Some of the critics' claims have legitimacy, but many do not. The Sensor Pad, intended to help women detect breast cancer, is an example of critics gone awry. FDA "ineptness," the Washington Legal Foundation claimed in ads run in *USA Today* and *Roll Call*, "is *still* killing thousands of women ... The FDA has obstructed approval—for nine years—of the Sensor Pad.... In Canada, the product was approved in less than 60 days."

In fact, the best evidence indicates that the Sensor Pad is no more helpful in detecting lumps in breasts than bare hands and soapy water. The device was once marketed in Canada but ordered withdrawn by officials who echoed the concerns of the FDA: that the product could actually be less effective than traditional methods and might lull

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women at risk into a sense of complacency. To blame the FDA for thousands of breast cancer deaths, then, is the height of irresponsibility.

But the critics have a point about another device featured in Washington Legal Foundation ads and used by Gingrich as a prop to attack the agency: the CardioPump. An aid for paramedics conducting CPR on victims of cardiac arrest, the pump is sold legally in a dozen countries, including Japan and Germany; in Austria, it is standard equipment on ambulances. Even though many health professionals are convinced that the CardioPump is a valuable, life-saving tool, the FDA has kept the product off-market. The agency defends its decision by pointing to studies showing that, while patients treated with CardioPump do in fact reach the hospital in greater numbers than a control group, they do not *survive* at a higher rate. Unlike the Sensor Pad, however, there is absolutely no evidence that people will suffer from the Cardio-Pump's use. Given that the pump certainly isn't harmful, why not leave the decision to paramedics and hospitals after warning them that the FDA is not convinced of its efficacy?

But if less regulation is required with some devices, other areas show a need for more regulation, specifically the thousands of products that were "grandfathered" into approval. That means they went on the market before the FDA began regulating devices in 1976 and were subsequently granted a reprieve until the agency could get around to checking them. In many cases, they still haven't gotten around to it, and consumer advocates rightly complain about the slow pace. Some types of pacemakers grandfathered into approval, for example, have a 25 percent failure rate. It's a glaring loophole in an otherwise tough regulatory scheme.

The Food We Eat

Early last February, the makers of Similac infant formula were flooded with calls from frantic parents in Southern California. The formula had produced rashes, stomach aches, and seizures in 54 infants. The FDA staked out warehouses, searched dumpsters, and eventually caught two men selling fake Similac to supermarkets. Within weeks, the fake formula was confiscated.

Such heroic FDA stories are not uncommon, and it's not just consumers who benefit. Just ask Pepsi Co. In 1993, when the FDA exposed as a

The Washington Monthly

Money & Politics Journalism Award

George Bauer and Steven Rosenfeld

Monitor Radio

Over the past year, the *Monthly* has taken occasional looks at how money drives the political process; we've also tried to keep an eye out for colleagues doing the same. The good news is that while the influence of money certainly isn't diminishing, press attention to it is increasing. Publications from *The New York Times*, which has been regularly examining how lobbyists affect legislation, to *Sojourners* magazine, which recently devoted an entire issue to money in politics, have provided models for how to raise public awareness on this issue. This radio series, which began in September and continues through the 1996 election, is among the best we've found. Bauer and Rosenfeld have been criss-crossing the country to produce vivid, informative pieces on how a "money-hungry political system" is corrupting integrity in local, state, and national elections—and in government. They've looked at how Willie Brown parlayed favors from his tenure as Speaker of the California House to feed his race for San Francisco mayor. They've gone to Mississippi to explore how Washington political consultants are transforming even rural races and upping the money it takes to run them. And they took listeners to New York, where a city councilman has brought suit claiming that the amount of money required to run for Congress is an unconstitutional barrier to electoral participation.

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hoax claims that syringes had been slipped into Pepsi, the company saved the millions it would have cost to recall and dispose of its product.

Yet much of the FDA's work is rarely noticed, let alone shone on by the klieg lights of press conferences. That's partly because their lifesaving work is so prosaic in appearance: At the FDA district office in Baltimore, I watched inspectors matter-of-factly sniff black tiger shrimp from Thailand —that's "organoleptic testing"—and scientists quietly testing baby corn and crab meat for botulism.

But while much of the FDA's work is admirable and underappreciated, the federal regulation of the food supply does need improvement. Spread across three agencies, it is often poorly coordinated. The FDA splits food regulation with the Department of Agriculture, which regulates meat, poultry, and some types of dairy products. The Environmental Protection Agency sets the rules for pesticides, and the FDA enforces them. The Department of Transportation even gets in on the act, setting standards for refrigerated vehicles.

With the resources it has, the FDA does a good job. But the resources are inadequate—and the jury-rigged nature of food regulation is a prime culprit. Take the recently-announced FDA rules on seafood inspection. One hundred and fourteen thousand Americans are poisoned by seafood each year; yet seafood regulations have changed little since the turn of the century. So it is a welcome sign that the FDA has finally overcome pressure from the seafood industry and imposed a new system of lab checks and computer monitoring.

But, believe it or not, the system will actually bring a decrease in inspections. That's because the new system is so complicated that it will double the average inspection time, but the FDA doesn't plan to put any new inspectors on the job.

And the shortage of inspectors isn't confined to seafood. FDA food inspections dropped precipitously from 20,528 in 1981 to 5,741 in 1994. The consequences are alarming: Raw oysters kill at least a dozen people each year, but the FDA has not responded to the problem. Last year in Florida, the Norwalk virus in oysters caused 121 illnesses, but there was no FDA recall. "The reality is," says Caroline Smith DeWaal, director of food safety for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, "they don't have inspectors, and they don't have a program adequate to meet the problem. With the pressure to approve drugs faster, it's only getting worse."

Why would pressure to approve drugs more quickly mean less regulation of food? Because the FDA has to do both jobs with only a limited fund pool. While Congress has piled on mandates for the FDA in monitoring drugs and devices, the blood supply, and medical procedures, lawmakers have made far fewer demands with respect to food safety. And so, with a total budget that is now stagnating in real terms—the agency received no increase for inflation in 1996 appropriations—the FDA has been forced to shift resources away from food. The $220 million the FDA spends on food regulation is only 40 percent of what the Agriculture Department spends on meat and poultry regulation alone.

Even with its comparatively enormous budget, of course, the Agriculture Department does not inspire confidence that it can keep tainted beef out of Americans' mouths. But the FDA shouldn't have to reduce resources on food inspections in order to increase resources on medical products—nor would taxpayers want it to. One sensible solution is to separate the regulation of food and drugs and devices into different agencies. If the FDA does keep all its jobs, Congress needs to make sure the agency is adequately funded for all its responsibilities.

Questions Still Unanswered

One magazine article can hardly cover all the important ground at the FDA. Consider the early testing of drugs on humans. Before a drug or device is even submitted to the FDA for approval, the "sponsor" has to go through a long series of tests. This is where most of the expense and delay in getting drugs from the laboratory to the pharmacist's shelf happens. How can these tests be done more quickly and at lower cost, and what can the FDA do to streamline the process?

The agency's actions in areas outside its traditional role of regulating food and medical products also need evaluation. Take cigarettes, for example. David Kessler is a hero for facing up to the tobacco companies. But is his agency the most sensible place to conduct such regulation? It seems more appropriate for the agencies responsible for fighting drug abuse—who now deal almost exclusively with illegal drugs—to spend some of their $14 billion annual appropriation curbing the abuse and youth-oriented marketing of cigarettes and alcohol.

Then there's an issue thrust into the limelight by Gingrich. Is the FDA hurting job growth in this

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country? Since his office would not provide evidence to back up his claim that the FDA was a "job killer," it seems the speaker may be on shakier ground than he might wish the public to believe.

Drug companies allege that the FDA has gotten slower and more bureaucratic since the thalidomide scandal of the early sixties—hurting their bottom line. So why is the stock of industry giant Merck & Co. 113 times more valuable now than it was in 1962 (in figures not adjusted for inflation)? Investors in drug stocks haven't just done well, they've done *very* well. Consider the story of Anne Scheiber, reported recently in *The Washington Post*. She bought $10,000 worth of shares in Schering-Plough Corp. in 1950. Today, that investment is worth $7.5 million. The industry as a whole has also done quite nicely. In 1980, non-generic drug firms had $12 billion in U.S. sales—a figure that exploded in the next 15 years to $57 billion.

Conservatives claim that the FDA hurts business. Then why is Merck's stock now worth 113 times what it was in 1962?

Yes, American pharmaceutical and biotech companies are opening some operations overseas, but it is difficult to tell to what extent, if any, FDA regulations are to blame. Fruit of the Loom is moving overseas, too, but not because of excessive underwear regulation. And it isn't just the drug industry that's booming. A recent report in *The Wall Street Journal* showed that Swiss firms are rushing to invest billions of dollars in American biotechnology. "It is in the U.S.," Ralph King reports, "where the biotechnology industry began and, for the most part, remains."

Some other criticisms are as dubious as the notion that the FDA drives American industry overseas. "The problem with health care in America today is the FDA," the Washington Legal Foundation claims in its ads. If the FDA is *the* problem, one wonders if the tally of 41 million uninsured Americans makes the group's top five? Other critics don't seem to share the basic values that undergird the FDA's existence. Henry Miller, a former FDA official, recently blasted the agency in a *National Review* article as slow and politically-motivated. But when I asked him about the study showing France and Britain with triple the number of drug recalls as the U.S., Miller replied that he wouldn't mind more recalls if it meant getting drugs through more quickly. Considering the devastation that a bad drug can cause—Clometacin was withdrawn in France after 130 reports of hepatitis, including nine deaths; Indomethacin-R was withdrawn in Britain after 717 adverse reactions and 36 deaths—this is hardly a trade-off most of us would like to make.

This is not to demonize the agency's critics. The FDA's job is important enough—and the balance between getting good drugs on the market while keeping bad ones off is delicate enough—that vigorous criticism of the agency should be welcomed, not dismissed out of hand. Still, it hardly benefits the public to have the conversation dominated, and too often distorted, by a right-wing fringe. When confusion reigns, groups in the know, such as the regulated industry and big-money donors to Congress, benefit. And the public suffers.

Enhancing public understanding of the FDA should be a top priority of government auditors, the press, and the FDA itself. As it is, the only way a major review can get started is for a high official to pressure the GAO or the inspector general at the Department of Health and Human Services. Such reviews are rare. More common is the confusion that characterizes debates over the CardioPump and Sensor Pad. Critics accuse the agency of stonewalling; the FDA responds that it's doing a good job. The truth is hard to discern.

What's needed at the FDA is a strong, generously funded inspections office, which at the request of industry or Congress or interested citizens could review the handling of a particular case, produce an explanation in clear language as to what happened, and recommend future action. This would both educate the public and inject a sense of accountability into the FDA's review process. And since government reports can get buried, the press is an even more important engine for honest and constructive evaluations of the agency.

In this heated political climate, tough, fair scrutiny of the FDA is more necessary than ever. Think about it: When you brush your teeth in the morning, you know your gums won't turn black. When you take pain medicine at night, you can be confident that you won't get hurt—and that you haven't been ripped off. You can eat your meals without worrying about salmonella or a surprise serving of rat droppings. We take all these things for granted. We can't afford to do the same with the agency that makes that possible. □

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Who's Who

Remember how a couple of years ago **George Stephanopoulos** almost went ballistic when the Resolution Trust Corporation chose **Jay Stephens**, a former prosecutor who is a Republican, to investigate Whitewater? Stephanopoulos obviously feared that Stephens would be biased against the White House. Now that Stephens has issued a report that, instead of tilting against the **Clintons**, largely exonerates them, you would think it would be big news. But the *Wall Street Journal* was the only major paper to carry a staff-written story on it; the rest of the major media buried it. Four days after the report came out, *The New York Times* not only hadn't printed a story about it but hadn't even gotten a copy. Remarkable incuriosity, don't you think?...

Arthur Levitt, the Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) chairman, first opposed then supported the bill that restricts investor lawsuits. Why the change? Here's the explanation that **Scot J. Paltrow** of the *Los Angeles Times* got from a key Senate staffer opposed to the bill: **Christopher Dodd** and **Al D'Amato** "repeatedly threatened to turn off the lights" at the SEC by slashing its budget if Levitt did not back off from his opposition to the bill....

Bill Clinton's tendency to blame others for his woes is legendary. The latest victim is Interior Secretary **Bruce Babbitt**. Insiders say Clinton is convinced that if Babbitt had done a better job handling environmental and land use issues, the Democrats wouldn't have such an uphill battle to retake the mountain and western states the President won in 1992: Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico....

Three St. Georges are coming to the rescue of the beleaguered cause of liberalism, at least in the bookstores. **James Carville**, **E.J. Dionne, Jr.**, and **Jacob Weisberg** will have books defending liberalism on the shelves soon....

During the Dayton peace negotiations, the Bosnians were having difficulty dealing with the State Department's **Richard Holbrooke**. So they asked **Richard Perle** to come to Dayton to help them out, according to **Elaine Sciolino** of *The New*

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Gingrich's heartbreak… Whitewater on the Fritz… Bob Dole: exterminator?… Clinton's puzzle…

'ienna. So it seems unlikely that the President was ısed by Ritch's description of the group **Hazel ,eary** brought to the September conference of the rnational Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna: "The of the U.S. delegation … exceeded thermonuclear ical mass and threatened to vaporize our sage of fiscal austerity to the U.N."…

\fter being impressively presiden- in delivering his veto message on GOP's Medicare reduction bill, l **Clinton** boldly began to te his signature—only to his pen was out of ink. We ldn't help but remember that ; at the Korean border when ɔicked up those binoculars to ɔect North Korean positions, ı lowered them, appearing puz- l, tried to look again, and finally ized that the caps were still on lenses….

Malcolm S. "Steve" Forbes, Jr. ɔrs a flat tax. Might he person- benefit from such a tax? The wer, according to estimates le by the Center for Public In- rity, is yes. He could save 9,000 this year….

There was one unfamiliar name on New York's ıton-Gore delegate slate for this year's Democratic ıvention: **Barbara Handman**. A possible explana- offered by *The New York Post*: Mrs. Handman is mother of White House heavy-hitter **Harold** es's wife, who is heading the delegation. Wouldn't want your mother to go, too?…

Speaking of **Hazel O'Leary**, her charter of that lux- ɔus MGM-Grand may not get all the media scrutiny ;serves, since the White House press corps also has l the plane….

n the 1930s, Groton produced about 20 graduates year. Yet according to the recent book about the ı by **Evan Thomas**, the prep school produced the lers of the CIA's most famous (or infamous, depending on your point of view) plots. **Kermit Roosevelt**, class of '34, oversaw the Iran coup that installed the Shah in power, assisted by his cousin **Archie**, class of '36. **Tracy Barnes**, class of '32, ran the Guatemala coup a few years later. And **Richard Bissell**, class of '32, planned the Bay of Pigs invasion….

Speaking of the old days, a sentence from **Ben Bradlee**'s new book that brought smiles to many veteran Washingtonians was this description of the *Post*'s "women's section" in the 1960s: "A photo of **Mrs. Dean Rusk**, attending some country's birthday—with the ambassador often in native dress—was one of our specialties." Friends who were around back then tell me that such photos really did appear at least once a week, with Mrs. Rusk carrying her hand bag **Queen Elizabeth** style….

For many years it has been traditional for Washington firms to make sure that they had representatives of both political parties among their partners. The principle was taken a step further by the marriage of **James Carville** and **Mary Matalin**. Another advance in the direction of keeping it all in the family has, according to *The Washington Post*'s **Al Kamen**, been taken by political consultant **Bob Squier** and his son **Mark**, who were on both sides of the recent sugar tax controversy in Florida. Mark produced ads saying the tax was needed to pay for cleanup of environmental damage caused by the sugar industry. His father's ads argued that "extremists want to tax farmers out of business."…

Al Kamen also has a different explanation for why **Bill Clinton** didn't invite **Newt Gingrich** to the President's cabin on Air Force One. The real reason, he says, isn't that the President was snubbing the Speaker. It was that the President was playing "hearts," a game at which the Speaker is not skilled….

—*Susan Threadgill*

Roman Genn

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The Missing Issues

What the presidential candidates should talk about (but probably won't). A round-up from the Monthly*'s contributing editors*

Banish the Pollsters *by Suzannah Lessard*

The most serious problem in our political life today, in my view, is not the rise of the right or the demonization of the poor, or the squeezing of the middle class, or the growing gap between rich and poor, or the inordinate influence of special interests, but the colonization of the minds of leaders—actual and potential—by opinion research. This is the most serious problem because, without leaders who act out of deep convictions arrived at by independent thinking, none of our problems will be solved. One might say that in democratic politics there is no power without popularity and the ability to compromise, and that the problem of politicians who are enslaved to popular opinion is therefore endemic to democracy. I would say that's true, but that the scientific methodology of contemporary opinion research raises a form of enslavement that is restricting and soul-destroying to degrees hitherto unknown. Before, politicians had to guess what people wanted: In that process, they may have been as ready to switch horses as any contemporary politician poring over the results of focus groups, but still—they would be guessing. There is a kind of thought in guessing. And there is uncertainty. That uncertainty creates an opening for taking a position closer to one's convictions; after all it might just be the right one politically as well. Under current conditions, however, there is almost no uncertainty. Or so it seems. Take this position and the majority of people will favor you. Take that one, and you will slip. The power of contemporary methodology is such that to resist it is to enter a race of Ferraris with a Model T.

Yet it is surely becoming clear that dependence upon this kind of research does not work in the long run because it erases the personhood of the decision-maker in the eyes of the electorate. In the long run, the perception becomes that there is nobody home. The point here doesn't have to do with issues in themselves, but with a person projecting the ability to have an independent opinion. Why was Colin Powell, who told us practically nothing of his positions on issues, so popular? Was it much more than that he appeared to have a strong sense of who he was and an ability to think for himself —that he seemed mature, dignified, *substantial*; that he seemed unintimidated by the opinions of the electorate—though perhaps intimidated by the election process—and undistorted by the prospects of success or failure; that he seemed real? Here's a real person, whose bow does not take its shape from the water, and where you have a real person, there is hope.

Hope is exactly the point. Without thought, courage, and independence of mind in our leaders, there is no hope; indeed, there is no leader. As a campaign issue this is one that, by its very nature, can only be worn lightly. If it were felt with con-

Research assistance provided by Jamie Peacock, Chris Pieper, and Renée M. Swanson. Cartoons by Harley Schwadron.

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viction, rather than presented as part of an image, it might actually contribute to a candidate's success. Or it might not. Certainly the predicament presented by opinion research would be a worthwhile and interesting topic to raise in the campaign as an issue of political culture. But the place where it should be raised with real urgency is in a candidate's inner circle. I know that if I were running for president, the dangers of this predicament, in which the iron vice of opinion research squeezes you until you are an ineffective ghost, would be uppermost in my mind. I would want to surround myself with people who viewed research of this kind as a far second to real thought and worked actively to help me keep its imperialistic tendencies at bay. I would want to make sure that I lived in an unprocessed world, so that I would stay real and therefore capable of wielding the power that I sought.

Suzannah Lessard's The Architect of Desire: Beauty and Danger in the Stanford White Family, *will be published by Dial Press in September. She is currently working on a book about the conservative movement.*

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less assume that the food we buy and pharmaceuticals we use meet basic safety standards? Air-quality has improved across the country over the last two decades; water pollution has been reduced. Theoretically you could argue that the right market incentives would have produced the same result, faster. The reality is that around the world, pollution has been reduced when governments have set environmental-quality standards.

Perhaps the most dramatic change wrought by the federal government in the last generation is breaking the connection between being old and being poor. In the early 1960s, before Medicare, retirement-aged Americans were much poorer on average than other Americans. Now they are, on average, richer. This change perfectly illustrates the way we should think and talk about the imperfect achievements of the federal government. Medicare and Social Security have been effective—but now they have become too effective. Too much of the nation's income goes to non-needy retirees, with too little left for children and working parents. The solution to that problem, of course, is not to abolish either Social Security or Medicare; instead it is to reform and moderate them, so as to have more of their positive effect with less excess.

In the real world, Social Security and Medicare illustrate how cynically and crudely we think about government now. Both parties have made the realistic calculation that they cannot discuss reductions in Social Security. When the Republicans discussed making cuts in Medicare, the Democrats pounced on them for this demonstration of "heartlessness." Both parties, that is, are willing to badmouth the government and act as if they wish it would disappear—except for its role as a giant check-writer to groups whose votes the politicians think they need.

What the politicians should instead be talking about—and in the real world, this means the Democrats—is the difference between jobs the government can do well and jobs the market can do well. The market can do most jobs better, but not all. It can't provide goods or services that benefit broad groups of people but are too risky or expensive for any single private investor. Private investors could never have built a national highway system. Private firms could never have provided nearly-universal telephone, electrical, water, and sewer services across the nation unless they enjoyed government-sheltered, regulated-monopoly status. The market has no way of preserving values that are clearly important to real human beings but have no easily-measurable price tag, from the existence of national parks to the benefits of living in a society in which few people are desperately poor. Any of today's academic economists knows what Adam Smith pointed out in *The Wealth of Nations*: The invisible hand does certain chores exceedingly well, such as matching buyers and sellers on a stock exchange, but "market imperfections" make it the wrong tool for many other activities. Our politicians seem to have forgotten this for the moment. The likes of Dick Armey and Phil Gramm may never have known any better. Bill Clinton and Al Gore should.

These were, after all, the leaders who gave us the "reinventing government" initiative. Behind it lay the idea that the government should be no bigger than necessary—but it should be that big. They launched that campaign only two years ago, but to judge from their rhetoric it seems like a relic from another geological era. To avoid the head-scratching puzzlement of their children's generation, the Democrats should stop aping the Republicans in pretending that the government is simply burdensome. They should talk about how it can better perform the tasks that only it can do.

James Fallows is Washington editor of The Atlantic Monthly.

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course, was largely a waste of time, but it's a gauntlet all prospective teachers must face. It helps keep short-timers out of the schools, even though short-timers—young idealists who would like to teach for a small portion of their lives—are something the schools need more, not less of.

Like my father, who had been a high school teacher all his life, my brother taught math. Unlike my father, who had taught mainly in suburban schools, my brother faced a classroom full of kids who were not necessarily interested in listening to what he had to teach. But he stuck with it, and in time he found ways to get through to kids that were supposed to be unreachable. Not all of them, of course, or even most of them, but enough to make him feel as though what he was doing mattered.

How did he do it? Not through anything he learned while getting his teacher's certificate—that almost goes without saying. No, it had far more to do with a willingness to show enthusiasm, to offer encouragement and extra help, and to go well beyond the parameters of the job. Not surprisingly, these are the qualities that allow teachers to succeed in even the most difficult environments. To be blunt, these are also the qualities one is least likely to find in a big city school system, where cynicism and apathy too often reign.

The best example of this in my brother's case was the chess club he started. No one had ever thought to start a chess club before—what could these kids possibly know about chess?—but my brother has always loved chess and was undeterred. He recruited students he thought might like it and showed them the various moves, and pretty soon they were hooked. Within several years, these inner-city kids who had never known the difference between a castle and a knight were good enough to compete with kids from private schools. The last few years, as they got even better, they competed nationally, which of course meant that my brother had to raise private funds since the school couldn't afford to pay for travel. Last year, they were the second best high school chess team in the nation. I know it sounds like a made-for-TV movie, but it's all true.

How did the other teachers react to my brother's initiatives? Suffice it to say that his willingness to go the extra mile—a mile that was absolutely not required under the terms of the teacher's union contract—did not endear him to his fellow teachers. Over the years, my brother was slowly frozen out. When he got married two years ago, I was struck by the fact that the principal was there—himself a controversial reformer type—but there was not one teacher in attendance. By then, most of the teachers in the school refused even to speak to him. Shortly afterwards, when my brother was put in charge of the school's computers—something he knows a tremendous amount about—another teacher filed a grievance. Finally, my brother threw in the towel and quit. He is now working as an actuary at a health insurer. The chess team has been disbanded.

My brother is hardly the only person this has happened to. Anybody who knows young, idealistic teachers—and I happen to know a number of them—has heard the drill by now. They come in with great aspirations, hoping not just to teach but to inspire, only to discover that the more devoted they are to the job—and the more they try to do things that go beyond the textbook—the more likely they are to alienate the rest of the staff. This, I am convinced, is related directly to the degree to which veteran teachers are unionists first and teachers second. And to my mind, it speaks directly to the single most urgent reform needed to save America's schools: break the teachers' unions. More than vouchers, more than "decentralization," more than any of the conventional reforms that will undoubtedly be offered up by the presidential candidates, this is the reform that can make the biggest difference in the lives

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of schoolchildren.

Why? Because it is the union mentality—a mentality that says do only what is in the contract and no more—that grinds down the idealists. Because it is union rules that prevent tasks from going to the most qualified rather than those with the most seniority and that make it virtually impossible to fire even the worst teacher. Because it is the union ethos that puts the desire for raises above the pressing needs of the students. And because it is union solidarity that freezes out people like my brother, who come to teaching because they want to make a difference. In every state in the country, teachers' unions are the chief impediment to school reform. This is no big secret. The presidential candidate who says this out loud will be signaling that he is serious about putting the needs of students above the desires of teachers. But I'm not holding my breath. And neither, I suspect, is my brother.

Joseph Nocera is a contributing editor to Fortune.

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talk about opening a second front in the struggle against permanent poverty. Maybe it's time to once again consider spending real money (try $50 to $100 billion a year) on new, well-designed programs that offer the hope of uplift rather than simple income maintenance. How would we possibly pay for such an extravagance in an America that already has the lowest—yes, I said lowest—budget deficit (in relation to size of the economy) of any major industrialized nation? Gosh, I'll have to put on my thinking cap for that one. Go after middle-class entitlements, of course, and throw in corporate welfare.

George Bush got it wrong—the problem is not our wallets but our will. If we must squander public money (and no modern democratic government will ever run with austere efficiency), why is it that the poor are always at the end of the line behind the corporate tax lobbyists, the agribusiness behemoths, the defense contractors, and the AARP? Just a small question to ponder as we wait so impatiently for the ersatz drama of the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary.

Walter Shapiro is a columnist for Esquire *and* USA Today.

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the slough in which the negative-issue spinners (yes, the Democrats have negative agents too) have mired American politics.

That timid candidates of all stripes are now running from any mention of middle-class health-insurance reforms means that the situation for the poor and working poor must be even worse. It is. An estimated 16 percent of Americans lack health insurance—by far the worst percentage of any Western nation. (Germany, France, and Switzerland supply advanced care to all their citizens; yet they spend considerably less on a per-capita basis than the United States does because they use sophisticated systems that blend the best of private medicine with the efficiencies of national health care.)

Even if you don't care how much those without insurance suffer, consider this: Most of the "medically indigent" are not the hard-core poor (generally they receive free care) but the working poor, poised on the boundary line between being productive members of society and slipping back into welfare dependency.

If there's one thing that knocks a working-poor family out of the paycheck category and back onto the dole, it is medical expenses. Often the heads of working families, saddled by high medical bills, have no choice but to leave their jobs in order to qualify for free medical care. For any candidate who cares about making work more attractive than welfare, the 41 million Americans without health insurance ought to stand as one of the leading issues of the campaign.

But instead of addressing the needs of the uninsured, some of the presidential candidates have instead shown a perverse devotion to increasing their numbers. Congress is perilously close to turning Medicaid, the program that supplies free care for the poor, into a block grant under full control of the states. Two things will happen if Medicaid becomes a block grant. First, many states will reduce eligibility, causing even more Americans to lose health-care insurance. Second, care quality will decline; many state-run Medicaid programs are already disasters. Given that reality, it's remarkable that Congress now proposes to shift more medical responsibilities to the states. Remarkable—and yet par for the course in the current discombobulated health-care debate.

Gregg Easterbrook, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly, *is author of the recent* A Moment on the Earth.

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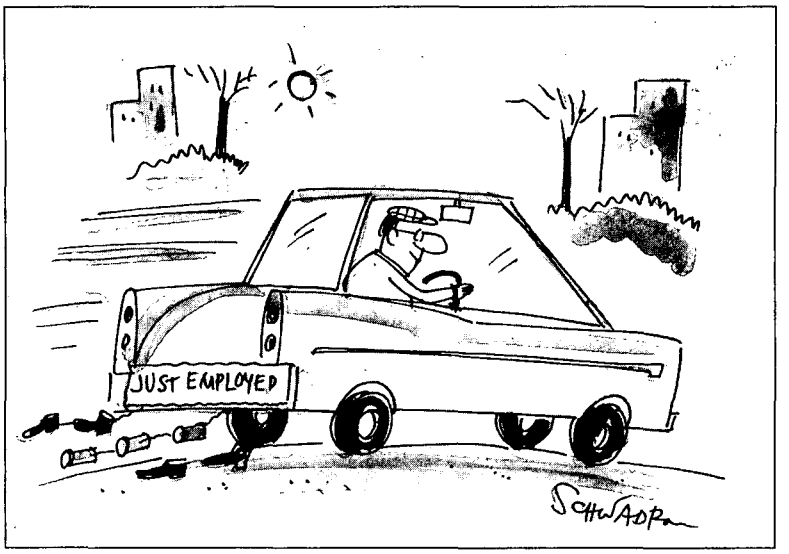
holders, they are transferring enough wealth from their workers to themselves to make it impossible for working stiffs, blue-collar and white-collar, to afford football tickets. We have already had our class war, and the good guys lost.

Work is the issue—creating more of it. What do we do if there is not enough work, enough decent-paying work, to go around in a democracy built on the work ethic, where self-esteem is rooted in what you do and how much you make? I don't know the answer. But I do think our democracy is based on a prospering middle class. Would the democracy survive if there were millions and millions of unemployed or under-employed men and women pushed out of decent-paying white-collar and skilled blue-collar work?



I happened to be in Tallahassee, Florida that day, meeting with members of the state legislature. When I mentioned my concerns about a work-ethic country without work—as our farmers were out of work and driven off the land after mechanization at the end of the 19th century—a member of the House of Representatives, Bill Posey, responded:

"The unemployed part of it has already happened in my district because of aerospace cutbacks. There is no economic hope here. Older engineers are laid off, and who needs them anymore? The young ones are in white-collar slave jobs, and when they burn out they'll be replaced by a new crop of college graduates."

Then Posey, a Republican who represents the central Florida area from Kennedy Space Center to Disney World in Orlando, said: "Unless people are independently wealthy, they're going to work; they're going on welfare; or they're going to steal. There are no other alternatives."

Trying to be optimistic and talking about technological advances and attitude changes that have greatly improved the overall quality of American life, I said: "Maybe we are talking about whether the glass is half-full or half-empty."

"I want to believe it's half-full," said Posey. "But if it is, I can see it's still leaking. We're not making anything the world wants."

"Well, airliners," I said.

"They're auctioning off the McDonnell-Douglas plant here this week," he said. "The jobs there are long gone."

Richard Reeves, author of President Kennedy: Profile of Power, *is a member of the* Monthly*'s editorial advisory board.*

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private apartments, poor people tend to get stuck living next to other poor people. The results are predictable and dismaying: jobs disappear; schools fail; guns, gangs, and drugs take over.

The good news is that the government may finally have learned some lessons about how to make subsidized housing work—or at least work better. Conventional public housing is a disaster. But the celebrated Gautreaux housing program in Chicago has pioneered a voucher approach that gets poor people out of the ghetto and into private, middle-class housing. Henry Cisneros, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, has worked creatively to imbue the same principle of income-mixing into other HUD programs. Subsidized housing doesn't have to be slum housing.

The bad news is that no one's interested, least of all Congress. The chairman of the Senate Housing Committee happens to be Alfonse D'Amato. He's held plenty of hearings recently about a housing development, but his interests are somewhat narrow—a modest tract in the Ozarks called Whitewater Estates. Meanwhile, housing aid for the poor has been falling off for more than a decade.

During the Carter years, the government helped an average of 290,000 new families each year find housing. Since then, the average has fallen to 74,000 a year—meaning it would take 72 years to work through the backlog of 5.3 million families with what the government calls "worst case" housing needs. No, make it 73 years, since under the next year's budget the number of new families assisted essentially falls to zero, for the first time in modern history.

As government assistance slows to a trickle, one group of Americans continues to get substantial help with housing: the affluent. The mortgage interest deduction costs the Treasury about $100 billion a year, or four times the entire budget of the Department of Housing and Urban Development; three-quarters of that money goes to the richest fifth of American families.

Housing subsidies in America now work best for those who need them least; let's hear the candidates propose some responsible ways to share the housing wealth.

Jason DeParle is a staff writer for The New York Times Magazine.

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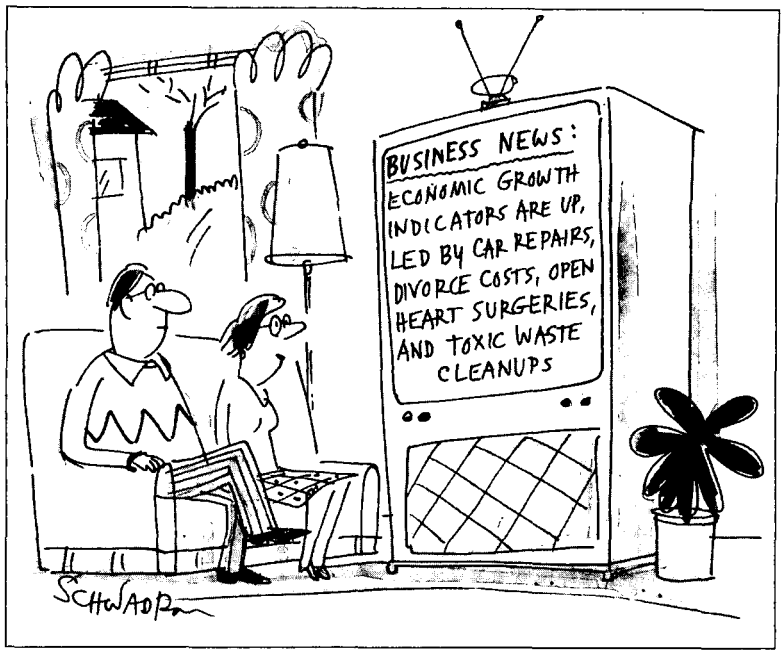
nomic well-being. The result is a Mad Hatter's accounting system that adds but can't subtract. Car wrecks, divorces, disease, crime—social and environmental breakdown of all kinds—get tallied in Washington as economic growth, simply because they cost money.

What Americans experience as bad, in other words, the experts count as good. Environmental breakdown gets counted as a double or triple gain. The factory pollutes the water: The GDP goes up. People buy bottled water to replace the questionable stuff from the tap: The GDP goes up some more. People contract cancers or other diseases from the toxic chemicals that are emitted: Medical bills make the GDP go up again. And on and on. It is on this crazy basis that economists say environmental protection must come at the expense of "the economy."



A second assumption is more subtle and insidious. The GDP includes only the part of the economy that is transacted through money. (The conventional economic mind can grasp only that which has a price.) This leaves out entirely the vital economic functions of households, communities, and the natural habitat. So the more these fall apart, and monetized products and services take their places, the better the experts say the economy is doing.

Child care takes the place of parents. McDonald's displaces the kitchen table. Air purifying devices take the place of the natural purifying functions of trees. More money changes hands, so the economists cheer—even though the economy Americans actually experience is going to hell.

This kind of thinking governs the policy establishment in Washington. It is built into the cost-benefit analyses that increasingly determine the fate of proposals of all kinds, (except certain ones that Republicans favor, such as curbs on abortion and the B-2 bomber.) Yet it is a relic of another era, when pedal-to-the-floor production was the overriding national goal. Today the economic problem is much more complex, and it goes much deeper than the two-tier economy and declining wages in the middle. Increasingly, Americans must contend with the new burdens that the economy (not just government) places on people in the name of economic growth.

The nation desperately needs new ways to measure economic progress, ones that reflect the actual experience of Americans rather than the brain-dead assumptions of conventional economics. It needs to distinguish costs from benefits, progress from regress; and it must start to value the functions of households, communities, and the natural habitat that are inherently beyond price. America has to gauge the actual impact of the economy on human well-being, instead of just the amount of stuff produced and consumed.

Such measures would be a truth serum to the economic debate. No longer could Bob Dole blast gangsta rap one day and call for increased GDP the next, when sales of gangsta rap are part of the GDP.

Put another way, politicians and pundits would have to stop hiding behind abstractions like "investment" and "growth." They would have to name what they are actually talking about. Investment in what? Growth of what? Casinos or apple orchards? This in turn would diminish the role of the purveyors of these abstractions—namely, economists—in the national debate. To ask questions of quality instead of just quantity, values instead of just price, would open the door to a much larger range of disciplines and concerns.

One particular issue that would change radically is work. Work occupies an exceedingly odd place in the nation's policy debates. Politicians extol it continually. Yet they listen to an economic establishment which regards work as a "disutility," a loathsome thing which people do only to gain the

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wherewithal to consume. They view the destruction of work—called "productivity"—as an unquestionable good. They rig the tax system to reward "investment," which can eliminate work, instead of rewarding work itself and the creation of it. (Today the Republicans want to shift the entire tax burden onto work, through a misnamed "flat tax" that includes a gaping exemption for unearned income.)

This view is obsolete. Work is much more than just a way to acquire money for consumption. It has value in itself. It provides a daily setting for social interaction, a sense of competence and achievement, and the opportunity to feel useful and needed. Some 70 percent of big lottery winners choose to keep working, as do most executives long after they have made enough to retire comfortably.

In other words, work today is more a good than many of the things economists call "goods." Increasingly, people need it more than they need the stuff that work enables them to buy. Yet the policy establishment continues to applaud its destruction (in the name of efficiency); and the GDP counts the production of stuff rather than the production of work, which people need more. A new measure of progress would include work as a good and its destruction as a bad. This would alter the nation's policy debate, from taxes on down, in a radical and healthful way.

Jonathan Rowe is policy director of Redefining Progress, an organization based in San Fransisco.

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campaign and the country. Mrs. Clinton's role was still a matter of dispute right through the transition following her husband's election in the fall of 1992. Had there been more time to get a consensus from the country, the Clinton health-care plan might have had a happier ending. Instead, the idea of her running the health-care reform effort was hatched in secret. Had the idea for a task force come out during the campaign, it quickly would have become apparent that the administration would have been better off giving health care to, say, a bipartisan commission, and we might have avoided the health-care calamity of 1994. I suspect the Gramms are quietly thinking about what Wendy could do with her vast knowledge of regulation. We should find out now.

Of course, some First Ladies will naturally gravitate to the more ceremonial functions of the job. But it's important to know what they will pursue. Nancy Reagan, of course, was known for her interest in refurbishing the White House china, but she played a huge role in policy making, as several Reagan-era memoirs make clear. Only investigative reporting could have revealed her bizarre reliance on astrology. But if our campaigns focused more on the First Lady, we might have learned pre-1980 that Nancy was a social moderate and a good check on her husband's right-wing leanings.

Because it is unlike any other position in the government, the First Lady's position demands special mechanisms of accountability. She is not on the government payroll; yet she influences the President. (This, by the way, should be changed. Post Kennedy-era, Congress barred the appointment of presidential family to cabinet jobs. Why hinder a President's power that way? There's nothing wrong with a Bobby Kennedy or a Wendy Gramm serving in the cabinet.) During the Clinton health-care debacle, there was a dispute over whether the First Lady was a federal employee. If she was, then the work of Mrs. Clinton's health-care task force was required to abide by various sunshine laws. Eventually it was ruled that she was not such an employee. But that does not mean that we should not scrutinize a First Lady as if she were. She is, after all, the President's first and most important hire.

Matthew Cooper is a senior editor at The New Republic, *where he writes the "White House Watch" column.*

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Another reason there is so little debate is that the rise of divorce was, in part, a response to a very real problem. Before the 1960s, women had trouble escaping from constraining or abusive marriages. Countless millions were subjected to lives of misery because they couldn't or wouldn't get out of horrible marriages. No one wants to go back to the old days, and criticism of divorce should not be viewed as a fundamental attack on feminism or women's rights. But feminists need to concede that the current situation is unacceptable, too.

Finally, this problem is ignored because the solutions aren't obvious. Galston proposes that we should beef up child-support enforcement to at least reduce the financial disruption. Some evidence suggests that fathers forced into making financial contributions tend to demand more of a relationship with their children. Galston also argues that divorce laws should err on the side of keeping minor children in their pre-divorce residences and communities.

The key is to draw a much clearer distinction between divorces that involve kids and those that don't. In fact, divorce among childless adults should be even easier, to reduce the odds of a baby being born into a disintegrating family. But divorce among couples with children should be harder. Too often, parents fail to look beyond their selfish needs; they should have to prove that separation is good not only for the adults but for the kids. Perhaps waiting periods or counseling requirements would mitigate the damage to children.

Most importantly, society has to offer clearer messages about what is shameful and what isn't. Casual divorce should be disparaged as much as casual sex. Pundits who reminisce about restoring the stigma to out-of-wedlock births might remember that divorce used to be considered dishonorable too. (In a *Newsweek* piece on this subject, Bill Turque recalls the 1952 *Look* magazine article about Adlai Stevenson: "Can a Divorced Man be Elected President?") If Bill Clinton screwing around on his wife was a legitimate character issue, then so too was Reagan's divorce from Jane Wyman after they'd had children.

At the same time, we should heap praise on couples that split up without having kids; by going through a small ordeal now, they've prevented a much great future tragedy. Conversely, some parents who stay together for the kids' sake should be considered heroes. The message should be everywhere —on TV shows, in the psychologist's office, and at the holiday dinner table—that while it often takes "strength" to leave a bad marriage, it takes courage and maturity to put the happiness of your children before your own.

To be sure, there are some times when divorce really is best for the kids. And it's very hard for any individual, let alone a lawmaker, to make sweeping conclusions about someone else's marriage. But at least a public debate about divorce might guilt trip some parents into putting the needs of their kids first.

Steven Waldman is a Monthly *contributing editor.*

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to college was almost a basic right of citizenship. This was fine with the higher-education interests, because it gave them a rationale for growth; and as the universities began turning out exponentially more people, businesses began using them as managerial hiring halls, turning an undergraduate degree into a credential for a white-collar job. But we never did decide politically who was going to be given the right to higher education. The result is that widespread access is almost assumed—yet quite fragile.

Congress is preparing to cut back substantially on direct federal tuition grants to poor students, and also on funding for student loans. The cost of loans will go up when President Clinton's eliminate-the-middleman direct processing is abolished and banks get the job back. In private universities, "need-blind" admissions, never very widespread, have been quietly dropped in most places. Only a handful of universities practice true need-blind admissions today. Public university tuition is still much lower than private, but it has been rising in recent years. In 1980, tuition at all the best state universities was less than $1,000, and in some cases (the University of Texas at Austin, for example) it was less than $500. Today state university tuitions are beginning to hit the $3,000 mark; the University of Virginia costs more than $3,500. This doesn't even count room and board. The effect is to take public universities out of the realm of being almost like public high schools, part of the package government provides to all citizens.

Clinton only occasionally touches on the un-democratization of access to college in his speeches. The Republicans almost never mention it. What's odd about this is that access to college is not an abstract, faraway, dreamy issue for most Americans. It is the crucial point around which they orient their lives as they raise children. Opportunity in the narrow, self-interested sense as well as the larger social sense is involved. Why don't presidential candidates realize this?

Let me make clear that I'm not calling on presidential candidates to propose a scheme to expand higher education to the point where there's a space for every single high school graduate. (What we ought to be giving every single high school graduate is a diploma that employers trust enough to use as a hiring credential.) The issue isn't universal higher education, it's universal access to higher education for those with the demonstrated ability and drive to get something out of it—but without parents who have the money to pay for it. College is the main way to get ahead in this country. It profoundly contravenes the American ideal to make it unavailable to those who deserve it.

Nicholas Lemann is a national correspondent for The Atlantic Monthly.

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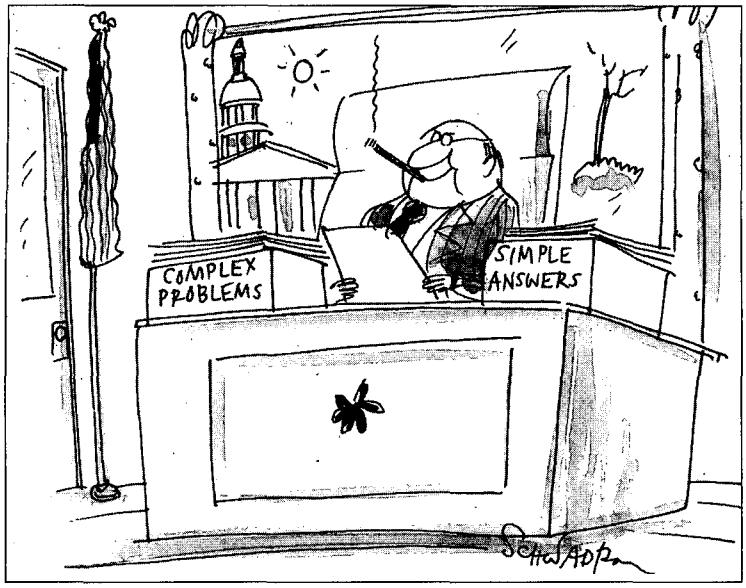

needs—in schools, day-care centers, environmental projects, hospitals, drug clinics, nursing homes, the criminal justice system, and so on. And having organized service programs in which mostly young people of all racial, ethnic, and economic groups work side by side for a clear, common purpose would help overcome the very un-American barriers that have sprung up between these groups in the past generation. Furthermore, unlike welfare or government grants, national service is not something done *for* young people; it's something done *by* young people. In national service, people who are now too often problems for the schools or the criminal justice system would instead be solutions.

The chief reason I voted for President Clinton in 1992 was that in his campaign he advocated setting up an ambitious national service program. And once in office, he did lead the way to committing some $1.5 billion over three years to a new nationwide youth service organization, AmeriCorps. But thanks to narrow-minded opposition from a full array of lobbyists, ranging from those representing veterans to those representing black colleges, AmeriCorps was set up for failure. It was kept too small to accomplish very much in the field or to develop a protective constituency in Washington.

Shortly after he became Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich branded national service as "gimmickry." Gingrich aide Tony Blankley elaborated: "Most Republicans oppose it. It is a program that spends a lot of money for few benefits. This is an employment program, not national service where work is voluntary." Apparently, Gingrich thinks that the whole idea of serving the country domestically is incompatible with being paid to do it in an organized way. Funny how that doesn't deter him and his fellow public "servants" from cashing their fat salary and pension checks.

Thanks to the new Republican majority, AmeriCorps is on the verge of having its funding totally zeroed out. True, some AmeriCorps programs turned out to be terrible—both a disservice to their participants and to the communities they are supposed to serve—but such quality control problems are not inherent. And many AmeriCorps programs are good and could be better still if more government resources were made available. How is it that with national service, discovery of shoddy programs is grounds for zeroing out the whole department, but not, say, at the Pentagon or CIA?

It's a shame that the increasingly rich and cynical members of the Washington and New York-based political press can't be bothered with national service either. (There are some notable exceptions, like Jonathan Alter, Mickey Kaus, Joe Klein, and Anthony Lewis.) But it's true, which means that it's up to the candidates—especially the President, who has previously identified himself with the issue and who has unrivaled power to keep it on the agenda—to do so. This is not only the right thing for any presidential aspirant to do, it's also the politically smart thing. Making a big deal of national service would hit a home run with young voters and would highlight real flaws in Congress and the press, which is at least a double with the rest of us.

Unfortunately, since the Republicans took over Congress, President Clinton hasn't really stood up for national service—not for the little bit he got into law, not for the lot more he knows is necessary. The election season is a fine time for him and the other candidates to talk about the impact a large-scale, ambitious, well-run national service program, putting hundreds of thousands of young people to socially constructive work could have on say, our welfare rolls, or on our current rate of nearly 1 million new teen-age parents annually, or on our 20,000 homicides a year (disproportionately of and by young people). How much worse does it have to get before President Clinton and his rivals finally focus on what the country really needs?

Scott Shuger has worked as a consultant to the federal government on national service.

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and "intelligent" women with a "good sense of humor," only to discover that they're all too often homely shrews who can't appreciate our witty banter. Unfortunately, Truth-in-Advertising statutes used by the Federal Trade Commission in other retail fields simply are not enforced here.

The Federal Communications Commission also should play a role in this completely unregulated area. One of the most grating elements of dating is the refusal of some people to return one's phone calls, despite good-faith efforts to leave messages at their offices and homes; this is a clear violation of long-established principles of both contract law and the Federal Communications Act. To avoid the inevitable problems that arise from unreturned phone calls—such as prolonged sulking, which negatively impacts a worker's productivity—it should be federal communications policy that all phone calls from suitors be returned within three days. If that person refuses to comply, she (in most cases, it's a woman) would be subjected to a series of escalating sanctions, up to and including reimbursement of all expenses—dinners, flowers, and so on—incurred by the suitor. This long overdue addition to current law would return fair play and egalitarianism to the romantic playing field.

Unfortunately, even if such reforms are put in place, too many people lack the *savoir-faire*, sophisticated tastes, and cultural awareness needed to make them competitive either in their personal or professional lives. The results of this national crisis can be seen everywhere. How many dates or business interviews have been ruined because someone didn't know how to pronounce the phrase "coq au vin" at a fine French restaurant? How many aging baby-boomers must stay on top of current trends to survive professionally, but still think the phrase "mosh pit" refers to an exotic Jewish food? All these people are, in one way or another, esthetically-challenged and trend-deprived. Many of them don't have the basic necessities needed to survive in the stylistic rat-race—MTV and *Details* magazine—and subsist only on a primitive diet of network television and used copies of *Time*.

My common-sense solution would tap both the idealism of young people *and* their burning passion to be "cool." Unlike its stodgy predecessors, the Peace Corps, VISTA, and AmeriCorps, the StyleCorps that I envision would enlists tens of thousands of young people in an effort to bring to benighted homes and communities the latest word on music, fashion, and trendy celebrities—supplemented by instruction in the classic elements of good taste and care packages of selected books and albums. Just as the Peace Corps brought electricity to Third World villages, this new initiative would, in part, spread symbols of good taste such as well-thumbed copies of *Remembrance of Things Past* or the new Smashing Pumpkins CD throughout the nation in order to bridge the class divisions that sadly divide us. Outfitted in black garb and Doc Martens boots, StyleCorps volunteers would help our country become more egalitarian.

WORK—Distressingly little attention has been paid by the presidential candidates to the drain on the economy caused by wasted creative activity. To rectify this injustice, the government has an obligation to retrain American workers to compete in the field that leads all American exports: the entertainment industry, particularly film. Under the inspiring slogan, "Every Man a Tarantino," this new program, modeled after the depression-era Works Project Administration, would unleash a flowering of creativity in a nation hungering for even more independent movies exploring urban alienation and random violence.

All these measures, then, deserve to be made part of the 1996 election debate. Without such initiatives our country's true greatness can never be realized. Individuals who once might have blazed brightly in public life will be forced to eke out a living in a tiny cubbyhole in some Godforsaken think tank while blowhards without even a fraction of their talent rake in all the glory and babes. This is a fate that we as a nation must strive to avoid. □

Dr. Arthur S. Levine, Ph.D. is a staff fellow at the Democratic National Policy Review Institute. He is not to be confused with Art Levine, a Monthly *contributing editor.*

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The Oprah-fication of American Journalism

TV and radio talk shows are in. Explanatory journalism should be

BY AMY WALDMAN

Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy
James Fallows, *Pantheon Books, $23*

Hot Air: All Talk, All the Time
Howard Kurtz, *Times Books, $25*

Is Rush Limbaugh a journalist? The answer, at first, seems easy: of course not. He freely broadcasts his biases. He blurs fact and opinion. He doesn't report in the traditional sense.

Yet Limbaugh delivers news to 20 million people in a given week; he's a primary source of information for many and an exclusive source of news for some. True, he openly ridicules Bill Clinton, but didn't Maureen Dowd do the same in *The New York Times* when she wrote that Bill Clinton returned to the university "where he didn't inhale, didn't get drafted and didn't get a degree"?

Limbaugh reads the newspapers, talks to politicians, talks to the public—he does as much reporting, in other words, as many who call themselves journalists. And his tendency to blur explanation and opinion is little different from mainstream journalists like Sam Donaldson, who glides from anchoring the ABC evening news to news/advocacy/entertainment on "PrimeTime Live" to pure punditry on "This Week with David Brinkley."

The answer to the Limbaugh question, then, is more complicated, and more depressing, than at first it seems. He may be a *bad* journalist, but as the firewalls between fact and opinion, and entertainment and education, collapse, he also may be the archetype of the profession.

The dismal state of journalism and its seemingly imperiled future is the nexus of two new books: Howard Kurtz's *Hot Air: All Talk, All the Time* and *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*, by James Fallows. Kurtz, *The Washington Post*'s media critic, probes the new, pervasive culture of talk—"trash TV" shows such as "Geraldo," the more sedate "Larry King Live" and C-Span, as well as talk radio and the dozens of "McLaughlin Group" spinoffs. Fallows, *The Atlantic Monthly*'s Washington editor (and a contributing editor of this magazine), concerns himself with the weaknesses—and hidden strengths—of modern journalism, focusing on the Washington press corps and its effect on politicians, policy, and the public.

The remarkable overlap between the two books says a great deal about how information is delivered to Americans today. Both authors worry that the same values that power talk culture—a casual disregard for accuracy, the centrality of pop icons who dwarf the subjects they're discussing, and the primacy of entertainment in a race for ratings—have come to dominate journalism.

Hot Air is a bit like channel-surfing—erratic, sometimes shallow, but still engrossing. Kurtz does a good job of showing how the transformation of the media created a new kind of connective tissue for Americans who once felt excluded by the mainstream press. The success of Donahue's early radio days, for example, showed that plenty of women at home were hungering for provocative programming.

The new media has broadened access to the public conversation beyond the relatively small group of gatekeepers who once controlled it. Kurtz's portrait of Don Imus's rise from a freight-

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train brakeman to a politically savvy shock jock reads like a media version of *Rocky*. On the air, Kurtz reminds us, credentials are de-emphasized: If you have an opinion, you're qualified. That Larry King turns from a Middle East specialist to ask in the next breath what Joan from Nebraska thinks of our policy is truly remarkable; it's opened up participation in public life on a scale our founding fathers could not have foreseen.

Kurtz inadvertently offers a reminder of why much of the public, and cultural conservatives in particular, have long felt alienated from the mainstream press. Kurtz lumps radio shows where "questions of morality loom large," such as a Christian radio station where callers speak out against teenage sex, into a discussion of jingoism, racism, and "garden-variety weirdness" on radio. Many Americans wouldn't find a Christian radio station or opposition to premarital sex the least bit strange, let alone as aberrant as Kurtz implies.

Still, Kurtz offers plenty of gems. "Penis out of my mouth is bad," explains Howard Stern in one of *Hot Air*'s more memorable passages. "But penis out of Donahue's mouth is good. Donahue can say he's talking about penis because he wants to help people and I'm talking about penis because I want ratings. Bullshit! Donahue talks about penis in November because he wants big sweeps."

Stern speaks the truth: The media world is increasingly penis-driven. The entertainment ethic has taken hold in even the most "respectable" news. Interviews with Kato Kaelin—"Exclusive!"—get more play than Medicare. That's why more Americans can identify Lance Ito than Newt Gingrich.

Breaking the News says more about why Kurtz's encyclopedic exploration should worry us. Fallows makes a convincing case that unless journalism reforms, it will further undermine our vital public institutions even as it makes itself irrelevant. He delivers an incisive account of the roots of change in the profession and a devastating indictment of journalists who have abandoned the commitment to public service that once was the cornerstone of a journalism career.

Fallows shows how financial pressures, particularly corporate ownership and the growth of television, have created "entertainment envy" in journalism. As a result, political journalism is fast becoming a hothouse where adversarialism thrives and discussions of policy wither. The coverage, as Fallows observes, increasingly resembles sportswriting: Newt Gingrich has been benched; Bill Clinton has scored. The day after President Clinton unveiled his welfare-reform plan in 1994, for example, the front-page stories on every leading newspaper were not about the reform's potential practical consequences, but about its political ones. The emphasis of politics over policy, of course, makes life easier for journalists: It enables them to escape the hard, sometimes tedious work of reading legislation and analyzing the policy implications of a welfare proposal or a budget cut outside the bubble of the Beltway. It's easier to entertain than to educate.

Once, journalists earned the authority to interpret the news by learning about their subject. Too often, that's no longer the case. Regulars on TV political talk shows cavalierly confess to Kurtz and Fallows that they know little more about the topics they discuss than what they glean from colleagues and the day's newspapers. On the "McLaughlin Group" guests are often asked to rate something on a scale of one to ten; there's no need (and no chance) to make an argument based on facts when time only allows you to toss out opinions.

Some journalists even take pride in their lack of knowledge. Larry King boasts that he never researches his guests in advance; he also rarely asks follow-up questions or challenges guests' assertions. The parody of King's interview style ("Interesting ... emotional issue") in Christopher Buckley's *Thank You for Smoking* remains the most apt description of King's journalistic practices. Kurtz cites a case in which King allowed a guest to make false claims about cellular phones causing cancer. A subsequent poll showed that half those surveyed believed it was true; cellular company stocks plummeted overnight.

For journalists, though, the change in their identity has brought profitable celebrity status. A journalist starts a career in print or network news and soon appears on "Crossfire" or "Capital Gang." Then comes payday: With television fame, the speechmaking circuit beckons. If you're George Will or David Gergen or Larry King, you take home more for a few hours of talk than most Americans make in a year. Fallows paints a politely scathing portrait of Steve and Cokie Roberts as "pundit profit-centers," a small industry unto themselves whose desire for *more* can't be sated.

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It's no wonder that Fallows characterizes the Washington press corps as having an "overripe, fin-de-siècle mood."

The press's mood matters because it profoundly affects the political process and the public's perception of it. Public officials increasingly govern not for the public but for the media. Fallows sketches a portrait of a White House that marks time by the milestones in a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week news cycle, from the morning papers to the evening news to the weekend talk shows. And he shows how politicians who understand the media's lust for sport can manipulate it. Newt Gingrich's ten-plank "Contract with America" got journalists so worked up about how far down his checklist he was that they forgot to inform readers what completing the checklist would mean.

The media's belief that to investigate and inform will bore their audience has profound consequences. Fallows shows how *The New York Times*'s Robert Pear's coverage of the health-care debate focused almost exclusively on what interest groups, from doctors to senior citizens, had to lose from reform, rather than on what the public might gain. "Useful information helps people understand what can be changed and what must be endured," Fallows writes. Today, millions of Americans are still without health insurance: Something that could have been changed now must be endured.

Given the current state of affairs, it's no surprise that government and the media are fierce rivals for the coveted title of most reviled American institution. Journalists command thousands of column inches trying to understand why Americans feel so angry about their government and so helpless about their lives. Fallows suggests that just maybe, it's the media itself that's engendering the futility and fury, the sense some Americans have that they're helpless pawns of powerful elites.

Reforming the press won't fix the political process, but it can certainly help. The question is how to do it. Fallows invests considerable hope in the public journalism movement. Spontaneously generated by disparate papers across the country, public journalism tries to re-engage citizens in their communities and the political process.

In one memorable story, Fallows recounts how the *Charlotte Observer*, a leader in public journalism, asked Senator Terry Sanford for his position on some environmental issues during the 1992 North Carolina primary. Sanford informed the paper that, sorry, he had no intention of talking about the environment until the general election. The paper's editor threatened to publish the questions anyway, with blank spaces where Sanford's answers were supposed to be. In about 10 days, Sanford delivered. (He lost, by the way.)

Public journalism isn't perfect. Papers take polls, for example, to ask what their readers want to know from their leaders; shouldn't the reporters and editors already know? And when newspapers actually engage in civic activities like holding town meetings, they tread dangerous ground between reportage and participation in events they should be reporting on.

But one aspect of public journalism has the potential to be journalism's salvation: the effort to identify, evaluate, and even recommend solutions to public problems. Not exploring solutions, and instead chronicling only which party is more successfully shifting the blame for the country's problems, has been perhaps the press's greatest failure.

It's imperative that there be more explanatory journalism showing why things are the way they are and how they can be changed—things like the *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s Barlett and Steele's "America: What Went Wrong"; *Frontline*'s "The Best Campaign Money Can Buy"; *The New York Times*'s recent efforts to look at how tiny provisions in pending legislation—whether severing Medicaid benefits from welfare aid or curbing U.S. power to protect wetlands—will have dramatic real-life consequences.

What's also needed is advocacy journalism that clearly identifies itself as such, and that uses facts to build an argument, rather than trying to outshout the opposition, McLaughlin-style. Finally, we need the creativity and integrity that could inspire, for example, a series that uses history to examine issues of the day, or a show called "Common Ground" in which a host maneuvers ideologically opposed public figures toward consensus on issues like national service or welfare or abortion.

Fallows's book is a timely, and urgent, warning: If the media don't change their ways, they will certainly become more entertaining—but they also will become more damaging. The press has been this country's most important and most enduring institution of continuing education. If journalists don't bother to explain and intelligently interpret what's happening to us, who will? □

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Memo of the Month

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

10 October

MEMORANDUM TO SECRETARY SHALALA

CC: KEVIN THURM
KITTY HIGGINS

FROM: HAROLD ICKES

RE: ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE ARKANSAS SEX EDUCATION PROGRAM

The President was somewhat mystified as to why there was no mention of him in the 3 October 1995 article in the Arkansas Democrat Gazette entitled "Sex Can Wait plan gets $200,000 grant: Federal Aid to benefit 16 school districts." Apparently the program is called "Sex can wait" and will receive some $200,000 this fiscal year for teacher training, implementation, classrooms and evaluation. According to the article, to quote, the money comes from the federal Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs, which apparently is within the HHS.

Obviously, not every announcement will specifically refer to the President, but all federal departments are being urged to make sure that announcements of grants and other programs refer to the President.

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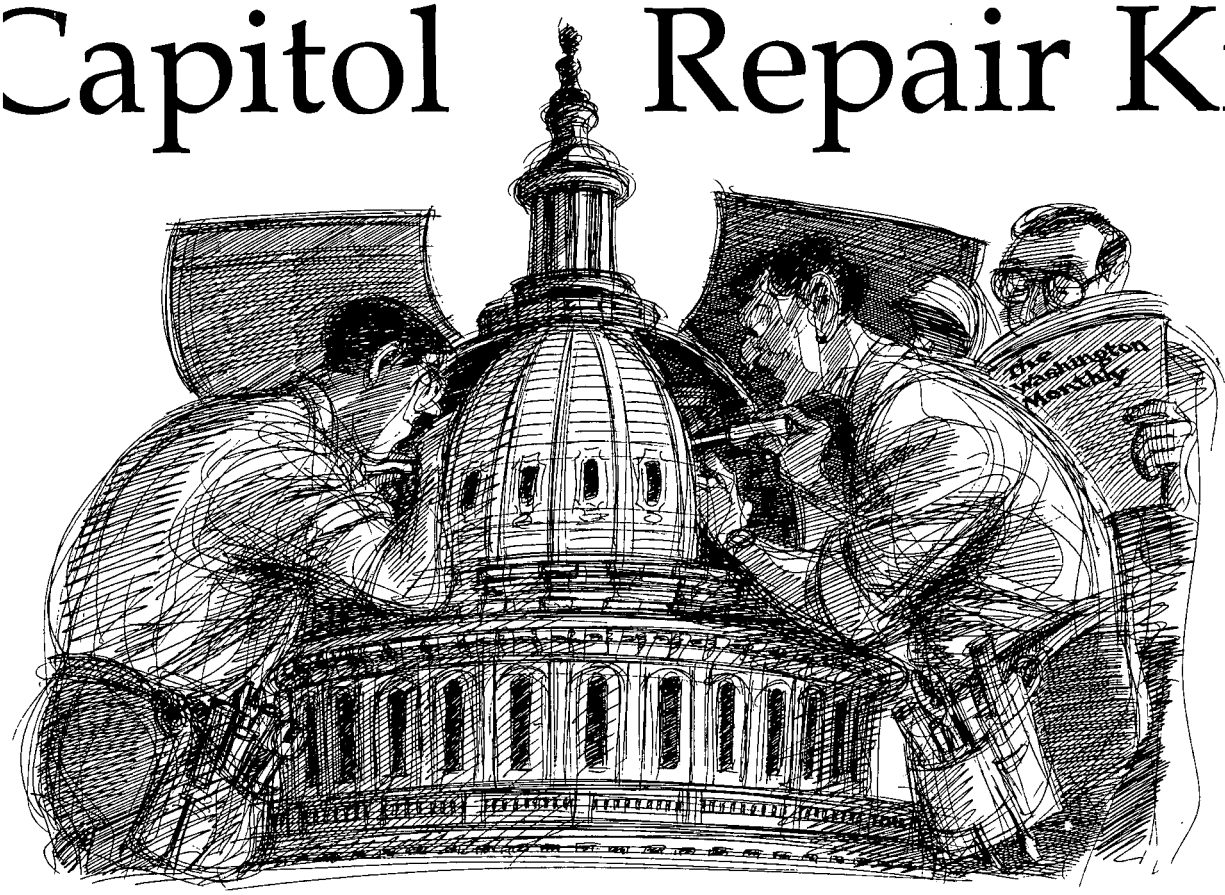

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It's a Wonderful Life

That's the message of Robert Samuelson's new book. The real story is considerably less cheerful—except for the affluent

BY PAUL KRUGMAN

The Good Life and Its Discontents: The American Dream in the Age of Entitlement, 1945-1995
Robert J. Samuelson, *Times Books, $25*

Robert Samuelson has a well-deserved reputation as one of the world's more thoughtful economic journalists. In a profession whose members are often partisan, ill-informed, or preoccupied with the latest headlines, Samuelson's columns for *Newsweek* and *The Washington Post* are exceptional in their combination of fair-mindedness, careful research, and understanding of the broader context. These same qualities are evident through much of his new book, *The Good Life and its Discontents: The American Dream in the Age of Entitlement, 1945-1995*. So I was surprised at how much I disliked the book. I expected to disagree with Samuelson about some things; I did not expect to be irritated and, in the end, actually angry.

Part of the problem is that the book is not exactly about economics. *The Good Life and its Discontents* is largely an essay about politics and society, topics on which it is easy to pontificate but very hard to achieve true wisdom. Samuelson's view of America may be summarized as "You never had it so good." Despite all the negative publicity, he claims, Americans have a material standard of living that leaves little justifiable reason for complaint. We complain so much, he argues, because we expect too much from prosperity. We are disappointed that our material wealth has not brought more satisfaction because we have forgotten that money can't buy happiness. (It's true: He cites statistics to prove it.) And we demand the impossible: economic growth without business cycles, freedom without inequality, and—most crucially—benefits without taxes. The American public has come to believe that we are entitled (hence "the age of entitlement") to more than society or government can ever guarantee. If we are to restore faith in our institutions, we must return to a realistic sense of what the economy and, in particular, the government can deliver—we need "responsibility, not entitlement."

The standard of living of the median American is, from a historical perspective, extraordinary. Samuelson is at his best when he is describing how much life has changed since the end of World War II; it is a rare economics writer who can get beyond the dry statistics of GDP per capita to give you a sense of how primitive life was for most Americans 50 years ago. He rightly points out that the disenchantment and pessimism Americans express about the state of the nation are often strangely disembodied: Many are sure that the country is going to hell even while they feel pretty good about their own lives and prospects. And there is no doubt that the average voter is still unrealistic about what it costs to provide the benefits he expects—only in the last few months has it sunk in that the budget deficit cannot be eliminated by reducing foreign aid and the size of the White House staff.

Yet, Samuelson's paean to the median standard of living makes me uneasy. A two-income family that earns a combined $30,000 annually and is only a downsizing or reengineering away from losing both its middle-class status and its health insurance, may live very well by historical standards

Paul Krugman, an economist at Stanford University, is author of Peddling Prosperity *and* The Age of Diminished Expectations.

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but is still closer to the edge than members of the professional elite can easily imagine.

Moreover, it seems strange how Samuelson insists on viewing American economic progress in terms of comparisons with 1945. Fifty years is a long time —two generations. While there has been immense progress over those two generations, the great bulk of that progress occurred during the first, not the second. Virtually every statistical measure of economic well-being—real wages, family income, poverty rates, and so on—shows a rapid improvement from 1945 to the early 1970s, but flattens out or declines thereafter.

Nor is the sense that economic progress has been spotty, at best, since around 1973 just a matter of possibly misleading statistics. At one point, Samuelson offers a list of 10 ways in which American life has changed fundamentally for the better, ranging from antibiotics to Social Security; it is hard not to notice that every one of those changes took place before 1970, with only marginal improvements since. During the first postwar generation, nearly everyone acquired a telephone; during the second, some of us got call waiting.

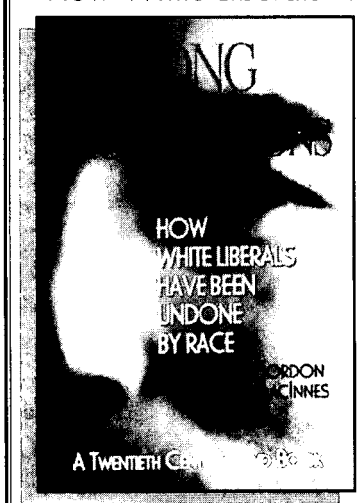
Samuelson's preference for comparing our current economic position with what it was two generations ago suggests a reluctance to face up to the reality that for more than 20 years economic progress has been uneven, and that in some important areas we have actually lost ground. Indeed, *The Good Life and its Discontents* seems to admit only grudgingly to the big failures of recent American economic development. The spectacular growth in inequality is given barely two pages, while a 15-page chapter is devoted to what Samuelson regards as excessive demands for equality. Rising poverty and homelessness are mentioned largely to question whether things are as bad as they seem in the statistics; the huge rise in poverty among children (a rise that is partly obscured in the overall poverty statistics by the decline in the number of elderly poor) goes unmentioned.

Samuelson's insistence on looking at the bright side of our economy is closely tied to his political analysis. And as his political analysis became clearer my annoyance at his excessively long-run vision gave way to dismay and anger. To put it bluntly: Samuelson writes about the politics of economic policy as if his views froze around 1984—just when it was becoming clear that the Reagan Revolution would not utterly transform the political landscape, but would lead to massive deficits (and before it was clear just how much richer the rich were becoming and how much poorer the poor).

In Samuelson's vision of American politics, the federal government is besieged by a host of special interest groups, often groups which "don't have solid power bases ... [whose] followers consist mainly of sympathizers who may, at most, pay modest dues. Such groups claim to represent —among others—women, blacks, Christians, environmentalists, 'family values' advocates, various ethnic groups, gun owners, and gay people." Because of the politics and psychology of entitlement, Samuelson argues, the government is able neither to say no to these groups' demands nor to

WRONG FOR ALL THE RIGHT REASONS

How White Liberals Have Been Undone by Race



Gordon MacInnes

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convince voters at large that they should pay higher taxes. The result is both persistent budget deficits and an ever-growing burden of regulation, as the government tries to legislate results that it cannot pay for directly.

Now this is not a bad model for the politics of the 1970s, a decade when it did seem that Washington was vulnerable to demands from practically anyone who could afford a letterhead. But is this model a good picture of the politics of the 1990s? There are groups that have real power bases today —with large financial resources and deeply committed cadres of loyalists. And they are overwhelmingly on the right. That is, they do not seek new regulations and benefits on behalf of the groups they represent, as much as they seek to remove regulations and benefits that protect other groups. Samuelson seems not to have noticed, but the tide is running the other way.

This is not an accident. In fact, it is in large part a delayed reaction to precisely the kind of interest-group politics that Samuelson describes. During the 1970s the forces of the right looked at the success of environmentalists, women's rights groups, and so on in driving the national agenda and set out self-consciously to organize themselves as a counterweight. And they have been overwhelmingly successful. On issue after issue, the newly powerful right has reversed the terms of debate and is within striking distance of reversing decades of policy. Samuelson seems oddly oblivious to this upheaval in the political landscape.

Take, for example, the environmental movement. *The Good Life and its Discontents* spends a fair amount of space taking on the excesses of that movement, pointing out that its leaders have been distressingly willing to embrace dubious science as long as it furthers their political agenda. Fair enough. But the peddlers of pseudo-science with influence in Congress these days are *anti*-environmentalists—and they have far more power than the eco-freaks ever did. Samuelson asserts that there is no "clamor to scrap environmental regulation." Really? What he means is that the general public does not want the regulations scrapped. Nevertheless, a determined majority in Congress is doing its best to get rid of as much environmental protection as possible (having already scored a notable victory against the nation's old-growth forests).

Or take the social safety net. Samuelson asserts that nothing important will change: "Although we may dismantle parts of government and redesign others, the end result will still be—by any historic standard—a huge government that spends about a fifth of our national income." If he means that Social Security and Medicare are not about to be abolished, he is right. But the spending that ensures a halfway tolerable life for unlucky Americans is on "means-tested" programs such as food stamps, AFDC, and Medicaid. This spending consumes less than three percent of GDP, less than 15 percent of the federal budget, but it is already slated for far more severe cuts than the rest of the budget and seems certain to bear a disproportionate share of further cutbacks. For millions of Americans, most of them children, things really are changing radically—for the worse.

In other words, Samuelson's picture of American politics—a weak-willed system unable to inflict pain and easily manipulated by anyone who can claim to be a victim—is strangely anachronistic. The political climate of 1995 is far more tough-minded than he allows; it is also immensely more mean-spirited and more than a bit scary.

Where Samuelson's selective vision becomes most conspicuous, however, is when he starts laying out scenarios for the future. He offers two alternatives. In one, the ethic of entitlement is replaced by one of "responsibility": The government does less, while there is a rebirth not only of the family but of "churches, professional societies, clubs, scouts, Little Leagues, self-help groups, neighborhood organizations." In the other, big government runs out of control: "Political paralysis ultimately overwhelms the private economy with high taxes, spending, and regulation."

Both scenarios are dubious. For one, it is hard to understand where Samuelson's fears about government taxes and regulation strangling the private economy come from. We are, after all, by far the least taxed and regulated of the major advanced nations, and the political currents are widening that gap. When people call for a federal government that does less—and especially when, as Samuelson does, they couple such calls with rhetoric about a restoration of freedom—I always wonder what particular areas of life they think the government should get out of. After all, once you account for interest payments and spending that is essentially about ensuring national security and public order, you find that the bulk of the remainder goes to

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only a handful of programs—Social Security, Medicare, veterans' benefits, Medicaid, and unemployment insurance. If by shrinking the government we mean cutting benefits to the elderly, that's a defensible proposal—but it has very little to do with the philosophical underpinnings of government's role. Similarly, most government regulation involves protections of the environment, health, and safety. The obvious examples of overdone pieces of regulation like the Americans with Disabilities Act, are relatively marginal parts of the federal enterprise. It is deeply misleading to suggest that reining them in would usher in a new age of personal responsibility, or even make a noticeable difference in most people's lives.

But the truly puzzling and, to me, infuriating thing about Samuelson's vision of the future is the scenario he doesn't mention, not even to reject it: the scenario of a future America ruled neither by entitlement nor responsibility, but by abandonment. This is the America in which government may still spend a lot of GDP on Social Security and Medicare, but it retreats not only from dubious commitments it has taken on in the last two generations but from functions we have taken for granted for a hundred years. What many of us fear is that we will become a society whose elite lives like expatriates in their own country—sending their children to private schools, living in gated communities protected by private security forces, even driving to work on private toll roads—while education, public order, and infrastructure for the population at large deteriorate even further. All this might well take place under the slogan of "personal responsibility," but it will have less to do with rediscovering Victorian morality than with recreating Dickensian poverty.

Now this abandonment scenario may not come to pass. But it is a vision that has become surprisingly pervasive in our culture: The image of a near-future dystopia in which high-tech luxury exists side by side with Third World poverty has become a staple not only of articles in intellectual magazines but of popular entertainment. I would not have thought that it was possible for a man of Samuelson's perceptiveness to write a book about the future of American society without even noticing that many people in this country (not just liberal intellectuals) think that the future will look like a scene from *Blade Runner* and at least feeling some obligation to say why they are wrong. Samuelson seems to have decided that the only thing we have to fear is that people will demand too much; we need not even consider that the powerless among us might be offered too little.

All of us have our blind spots. But when a commentator as intelligent and influential as Samuelson chooses to avert his eyes from the disturbing trends in our economy and, above all, our politics, it may do real harm. Reading this book, I was reminded of a grim old joke: "A while back, when I was feeling very depressed about the path my life was taking, a wise man spoke to me. 'Take it easy,' he said. 'Things could be much worse.' So I took it easy, and, sure enough, things got much worse." □

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Political Booknotes

Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time
Dava Sobel
Walker & Co., $19
By Gregg Easterbrook

Writers have long been fascinated with the centuries of effort required to devise reliable clocks, and the attendant imposition of notions like "standard" time and the time-regulated workday. The recent intellectual fashion has been to depict the development of accurate timepieces not as a convenience, but as part of the plot to divest people of their mystic connection to the pretechnological rhythms of nature by substituting a regimented clock-consciousness that served the interests of the lords of commerce. Probably the best expression of this view is Ronald Wright's beguiling 1991 book *Time Among the Maya*, which implausibly, if captivatingly, depicts ancient Mayan culture as more human than ours because the Mayans believed time was not linear (tick...tick...tick) but in some vague fashion "circular" (tick...retick...tick). In postmodern theory, the progression from timekeeping based on sundials to giant pendulums to water engines with thousands of pieces to cheap digital devices with no moving parts is one long horror story. [Not that any intellectual would want to be late to a symposium to enounce this view.]

Yet as science writer Dava Sobel points out in her engaging and delightful new book *Longitude*, the big breakthroughs in clock construction came in pursuit of seafaring, not social regulation. In the 15th century, when nations began to sail the world's oceans seriously, the greatest obstacle to navigation was the inability to determine longitude (position east-west) at sea. Latitude (position north-south) could be read by observing the apparent motion of the sun. But this technique did not apply to longitude, and as a result the fleets of Europe spent inordinate time and incurred constant loss of life essentially wandering the high seas, trying to figure out where they were.

Minds as famed as Galileo, Newton, and Halley applied themselves to the problem and believed its solution lay in observation of the moon or the satellites of Jupiter. Sobel's tale concerns John Harrison, an obscure English watchmaker from a merchant-class background who believed clocks held the answer. Harrison had to battle the budding English science establishment, which wanted the solution to be based on the glamorous, aristocratic pursuit of astronomy, not the tinkerings of a mere craftsman. Sobel's story is rich with fascinating details both of scientific investigation and the bureaucratic politics of 18th-century England. *Longitude* is well-timed too, as the new Umberto Eco novel *The Island of the Day Before* features a protagonist marooned on an 18th-century vessel stocked with bizarre longitude instruments.

Serious pursuit of a means of fixing longitude began in 1707, after four British frigates ran aground in fog near their home port owing to total east-west disorientation, with the loss of nearly 2,000 men. Sobel recounts, in a horrifying passage, how after the vessels became lost in a week-long mist, a sailor approached Admiral Sir Clowdisley Shovell to declare that a private navigational logbook he had been keeping indicated the squadron was about to founder on the dangerous rocks of Scilly Isles southwest of England. British fleet rules then forbade any study of navigation by non-officers, because navigators had a wizard's status no enlisted personnel were allowed to challenge. Sir Clowdisley immediately had the sailor hanged for questioning the judgement of an officer. Shortly afterward, his flagship plowed into the Scilly rocks, the three following ships faithfully smashing in as well.

Sadly, Sobel does not know the name of this lost sailor, who seemingly hit upon a significant idea and might himself have become an important figure had he not lived in a society that discriminated ruthlessly against the low-born. At any rate, the English government's response to the event was not to redress the outrage of executing a common man for telling an officer the truth, but to create a new bureaucracy—the Board of Longitude, which was to supervise research and award a prize of £20,000 (equivalent then to $12 million now) for the first reliable means of longitude fixation. In a manner that *Washington Monthly* readers are likely to find hauntingly familiar, the Board served mainly to suppress the most promising inventions, channel funds to the politically favored, and then remained in existence for 50 years after the problem of longitude was solved.

Harrison, an odd, reclusive man, proceeded on the assumption that a highly accurate clock would crack the nut. If a clock could show precisely the moment of noon at a ship's home port and sightings of the sun were

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employed at sea to determine the local noon, differences between the two could be employed to determine degrees east or west, roughly by calculating how many time zones the ship had passed through. This idea was generally known in the 18th century, but most scientists assumed clocks could never be made reliable enough for the task. Pocket watches of the era gave only an approximation of the hour; even vast clock-tower assemblies had to be readjusted daily. Friction between knurled parts, humidity changes, and the rolling of vessels at sea wiped out the accuracy of all navigation clocks the navies of the Renaissance attempted to build.

Undeterred, Harrison spent his entire adult life locked away in a modest workshop pursuing an accurate clock, abandoning the pendulum in favor of gears. By 1722, he had produced a remarkably low-friction tower clock for an English manor house: The clock has now run continuously for more than 250 years. From 1737 to 1759, Harrison built three fantastic-looking naval chronometers, devices the size of desks that contained hundreds of gears and thousands of hours worth of intricate metalwork. Sent to sea on a trial, one of the clocks allowed nearly perfect longitude readings. But Harrison's attempt to claim the longitude prize was denied, as factions of the Board tried to channel the prize money to favorites. The Board kept stipulating that Harrison's clocks pass tests more strict than required in the original prize definition, while reducing the test requirements on solutions proposed by aristocrats.

In 1760, Harrison produced a device as revolutionary in its time as the silicon chip has been in ours—namely, the first timepiece to bear the name watch. A fraction of the size or cost of his previous inventions, the watch kept near perfect time no matter how harshly it was bounced around. The success of this British invention in enabling accurate timekeeping at sea is a reason the English were able to enforce establishment of zero longitude as passing through the old Royal Observatory on the Thames River town of Greenwich, and to deem Greenwich Mean Time the world's basis for time accounting.

For Harrison, the invention of the watch led to an incessant, Dickensian legal case over attempts to claim the longitude prize. By 1773, Harrison was 80, in failing health, and still not the recipient of the award, which the Board of Longitude steadfastly refused to confer upon him, in order to justify its previous resistance to timekeeping over astronomy. George III developed an interest in Harrison's cause; yet even the king was unable to make the Board of Longitude waver. Finally, Parliament bestowed a cash prize and deed of thanks on Harrison directly, so at least the inventor died with the knowledge of his vindication. The Board of Longitude was so incensed by this challenge to its authority that ultimately it never awarded the original £20,000 to anyone. When the HMS Beagle set sail in 1831, its intended purpose to map the longitude of Pacific

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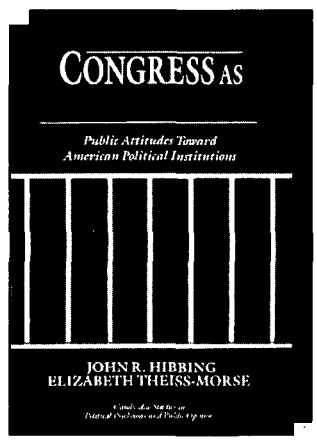

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islands, its primary equipment a complement of 22 chronometers, the Board of Longitude was still in existence, still arguing about who should have gotten its prize in the previous century.
Gregg Easterbrook is a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly *and author of the recent* A Moment on the Earth.

The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars
Todd Gitlin
Henry Holt, $25
By Jonathan Alter
My idea of hell on earth would be life as a lefty professor at Berkeley in the 1980s and early 1990s. A conservative could oppose the politically correct idiocy, but as a liberal professor I would have felt obligated to uphold the basic values of my creed, while quietly enduring the most appalling manifestations of multiculturalism. Some of that is receding now—the demands to spell "women" as "womyn" seem a tad off the point—but for a while, it was bad.

Todd Gitlin, a former president of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and author of books on the 1960s and the media, has lived that hell and survived to tell the tale. In *The Twilight of Common Dreams*, Gitlin delivers a devastating description of how identity politics have wrecked the American left, which he contends, is pretty much confined to academia these days.

Gitlin's survey of the left's demise is cogent and useful, and his stories of academic life are harrowing. "While the Right was occupying the heights of the political system, the assemblage of groups identified with the Left were marching on the English Department," he writes. It was the irrelevance as much as the pettiness of liberal academic politics that's so annoying—the "rapture of marginality," in Gitlin's words, "the narcissism of small differences" in Freud's.

Gitlin is especially good in connecting academic fads like Michel Foucault with the descent into absurdity. "From 'the personal is political' it was an easy glide to 'only the personal is political'—that is, only what I and the people like me experience ought to be the object of my interest," he writes. The examples, such as the group of women of color who staged a walkout from a women's studies course at the University of Michigan in 1991 because "only one-third" of the assignments were written by women of color, are familiar, but Gitlin gives such fundamental irrelevancies a personal twist and illuminating context.

In 1992, for example, the sociology department at Berkeley nominated a French leftist named Loic Wacquant for a professorship in Chicano studies. He was perfectly politically correct, except that he had applied late, didn't specialize in Chicano studies, and was reputed to be a "bad listener." A boycott of Wacquant ensued, and it became the main activity of the left even as California's state government was savaging the budget for all levels of education. Such misplaced priorities remind Gitlin of the story of the fool on his hands and knees searching the sidewalk under a streetlight. "What are you looking for?" a passerby asks. "My watch." "Where did you lose it?" "Over there," says the fool, pointing to the other side of the street. "Then why are you looking here?" asks the passerby. "Because it's dark over there," says the fool.

Gitlin is also hard on the mainstream press for describing political correctness as a new McCarthyism. "P.C. did not, in fact, haul miscreants up before congressional committees," he writes, "fire or flunk nonconformists, pillory them in the press or take their passports away." But Gitlin's attack on the anti-P.C. overkill misses the point. Just as liberals earlier in the century had to purge communists from their ranks, the radical multiculturalists he's taking on must be fought, not just reasoned with. It's hard—even paradoxical—to build a commonality movement by excluding people, but as Hubert Humphrey and other liberals learned in the 1940s, it's the only way.

"For too long," Gitlin writes,"too many Americans have busied themselves digging trenches to fortify their cultural borders, lining their trenches with insulation. Enough bunkers! Enough of the perfection of differences! We ought to be building bridges."

Yes, but cooperating with other factions in opposition to the right is not nearly enough. We need to totally redefine what it means to be progressive, liberal, or of the "left." In part, that will mean subordinating individual causes and identities, such as ethnicity, to a larger, common interest. Tony Blair, the likely next prime minister of Great Britain, has begun to do that with the Labor Party. If Bill Clinton had been more clear-headed, he might have done it here. It is gratifying to see a bona fide liberal break free of liberal dogma. For those who didn't know it before, Gitlin has illuminated the wrong turn we made and shown us where we shouldn't go. Next, maybe someone can muster the vision to show us where we should.
Jonathan Alter is a columnist for Newsweek.

The Vanishing Vision: The Inside Story of Public Television
James Day
University of California Press, $29.95
By Lawrence K. Grossman
Reader Alert: This reviewer spent eight years (1976 to 1984) as president of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), pursuing James Day's "vanishing vision." My more or less turbulent PBS tenure is described in Day's book largely, though not entirely, in flattering terms.

Also in the interest of full disclosure, readers should be aware that my praise of this book appears on its back cover. It may be hard to imagine that a book detailing the many petty bureaucratic entanglements that have consistently plagued American public television could be of interest to the general

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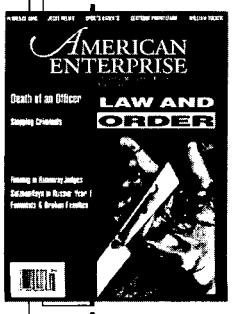

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reader. But James Day's *The Vanishing Vision* is. It's appealing and timely, a cautionary tale about what can go wrong in the public sphere when a system has no clear definition or mission. Is public television supposed to compete with the high-gloss commercial sector to provide a quality alternative? Or should it be a collection of grassroots outlets, with little central authority or overall vision?

PBS's basic problem is that it was built by people who knew almost nothing about television. They did not understand, for example, that the cost of a major series far exceeds what any local station can afford. When I came to PBS in 1976, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (the funding arm of public TV) received millions in federal funds but bore no responsibility for the public television schedule. Meanwhile, PBS (the programming arm) was responsible for the national schedule but had no money to commission programs. The result was—and is—incessant internecine warfare.

Consider the case of "The MacNeil/Lehrer Report" (now the "Newshour with Jim Lehrer"). When I became PBS president, the show was being produced and broadcast by WETA in Washington and WNET in New York City. I suggested making it a national program—giving the show to other stations for free for six months in the hope that they'd eventually pay for it.

I thought this was a good plan. But the individual stations objected to what they saw as an encroachment on their autonomy. Not that they had a problem with "MacNeil/Lehrer." It was the fact that I recommended a specific program to local stations—as if the Secretary of Education urged all local schools to use a specific text.

Though "MacNeil/Lehrer" went forward, it was a revealing moment. American public television was designed much like our school system—local outlets with little central authority. But viewers don't care about stations. They care about programs. And quality programs—such as "Sesame Street" or Ken Burns's "Civil War" or the authoritative "Vietnam: A History"—require more capital than any single station, or even a handful of stations, can muster. With commercial television aiming lower and lower—despite a multiplicity of channels and a few exceptional entertainment highlights, most television is more debased than ever—this country desperately needs TV that aims higher.

As Jim Day puts it, we need a medium "with respect for the intelligence of its viewers, willing to address its audience not just as consumers but as sentient human beings; a medium dedicated to offering the best because it is the best and not simply because it reaches the largest numbers inside the advertiser's demographic target."

Other countries have always recognized this need and have designed public broadcasting systems that fulfill it. In this country, public TV and radio were an afterthought, constructed only after commercial outlets had become extraordinarily profitable and, not

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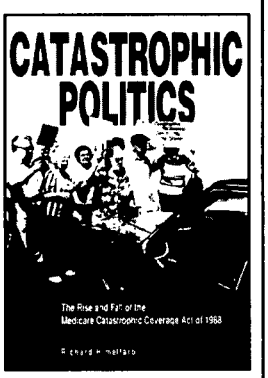

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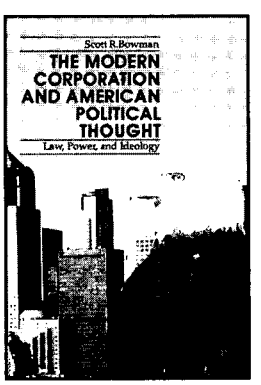

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coincidentally, politically powerful. Even when leftover channels were finally reserved for noncommercial educational and public service use, no provisions were made to give them the money they needed to operate. To survive, American public broadcasters had to invent an often intrusive and occasionally embarrassing patchwork quilt of funding mechanisms. These include begging for public memberships, corporate and foundation underwriting, and federal, state, and local educational appropriations. It's true that having no single funder makes American public television less encumbered by political interference than any other nation's public system, including the BBC. But chronically inadequate funding has also left the system financially insecure.

As a result, America's public television time always has been filled with more than its share of British imports, which tend to be well produced and, like hand-me down suits, much cheaper to acquire than new shows. Once, when introducing a distinguished visitor from the BBC to a public television meeting, I cracked, "I can't imagine where American public television would be if the British didn't speak English." That remark attracted attention and, understandably, upset many of my colleagues. But the joke was all too true. As Day writes, "Public television's mission is not to add to the volume but to the *quality*, not by importing from abroad, and not by appropriating 'quality' commercial shows that lose out in the competitive drive for audience, but by creating new art, new ideas, new and different programs." American public television's record in achieving that mission is far less than it should be. We export Schwarzenegger but have to import "Prime Suspect."

Notwithstanding the recent demand of the Republican congressional majority to "privatize" public television, new telecommunications technologies offer fresh opportunities to revitalize the tired and inadequate public system. The internal conflict of PBS is that the airtime and money taken up by finely produced, restrained shows like "MacNeil/Lehrer" mean less experimental programming. That could dramatically change in an era of exploding technological advances. A public broadcasting service for the 21st century could be multi-channeled and interactive, connecting schools, universities, libraries, museums, and homes with quality programming, education, and civic information. With sufficient funds and channels, PBS could provide forums for citizen groups, as well as nationally broadcasted series such as "Civil War."

How to pay for this new, improved system? With money from spectrum auctions, license fees for the commercial use of public airwaves, satellite paths and cable monopoly franchises, and a tax on the mergers and acquisitions of companies that profit from the public's telecommunications resources. The FCC has already demonstrated that billions of dollars can be raised through spectrum auctions. Though some are moving to give away tens of billions of dollars worth of spectrum, that spectrum belongs to the public; it should be auctioned off, and some of the proceeds used to advance the public good.

Equally important, as Jim Day points out, public television itself needs total reorganization and simplification. What money there is can be spent on quality programming and content rather than on overlapping, top-heavy organizations, stifling bureaucracy, and excess hardware. For example, the country has 50 percent more public TV stations than are needed to reach every American.

James Day, the idealist, is right. The vision cannot be allowed to vanish. In the new multi-channel world, we must reserve an important place for the best our civilization can provide.

Lawrence K. Grossman, author of The Electronic Republic: Reshaping Democracy in the Information Age, *was president of the Public Broadcasting Service and NBC News.*

Total Risk: Nick Leeson and the Fall of Barings Bank

Judith H. Rawnsley

Harper Business, $24

By S.C. Gwynne

The most scandalous event in the financial world this year was undoubtedly the single-handed destruction of Britain's ancient Barings Bank by a 28-year-old trader named Nicholas Leeson. Leeson's actions were provocative enough: He lost more than a billion dollars in high-risk trades on Japan's Nikkei exchange. But what really jolted financiers from Bern to Boston was the notion that he had enough power to do such a thing at all. What organization could possibly grant that much definitive institutional authority to anyone in middle management, let alone someone with only two years of trading experience?

The answer is an organization that was both profoundly greedy and enamored of hearing only a certain kind of news. I watched the demise of the 232-year-old bank with a mixture of horror and fascination. The story interested me because I, too, was once a young banker in Asia entrusted with large chunks of American capital. I worked for a commercial bank, which is about 100,000 light years from Nick Leeson's arcane derivatives trading operation. Still, the organizational similarities are striking. I was young, inexperienced, and putting someone else's money at risk through Third World loans. Leeson was young, inexperienced, and putting someone else's money at risk through futures investments. We were both victims and exploiters of a corporate pathology that encouraged us to report continuous and prodigious good news. In my case, the good news concerned all the loans I was making in Indonesia and the Philippines. My bosses wanted to hear that those loans were safe and profitable, and I (and thousands of others like me) dutifully told them what they wanted to hear. The result was billions of dollars in foreign loans that went into a decade-long deep freeze all over

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the planet as well as billions of dollars in bank losses. Leeson's bosses, watching from England as his enormous Asian profits rolled their way, wanted to hear the same siren song.

Leeson's predations are the subject of the first book to be published on the demise of Barings, *Total Risk: Nick Leeson and the Fall of Barings Bank*, by former Barings employee Judith H. Rawnsley. This is the story of a very bad management error: first, to have empowered him, and second, to have believed his eternal stream of good news and huge profits. Barings Bank, eager to catch up to the rest of the financial world, put Leeson in a job in Singapore where he traded some of the most dangerous and little-understood instruments in the financial markets: derivatives. Barings's own management did not understand them and did not have a clue as to what Nicholas Leeson was doing. In addition to letting him trade these sensitive, risky instruments, his bosses at Barings also let him run the "settlement" room where his deals were accounted for, thus violating a cardinal rule of the banking business.

Still, had it chosen to do so, the company had plenty of opportunities to disbelieve Leeson's staggering chain of financial successes. The Panglossian optimism that has always lain behind history's great financial lies operated here on a dizzying scale. Leeson not only told his bosses that he was doing massive trades with clients'—not the company's—money, but that the company's positions were all neatly hedged and therefore virtually risk-free. It was on the basis of his promises that Barings blithely pumped another billion dollars or so into Leeson's Singapore-based operation, even as rumors of impending doom swept the market (and several companies refused to do business with Barings). "From the outside and with hindsight it seems staggering that such vast sums of money could have been sent out to fund Leeson's trading activities without anyone finding out that it was being used for hidden trades," writes Rawnsley. She also notes that the company's principals "seem to have made no attempt ... to investigate the rumors to the extent of checking that the positions were in fact matched."

Rawnsley uses much of the book to write an organizational history of the bank, suggesting that Barings's somewhat hesitant and often confused move into the securities business in Asia in the early 1990s created a sort of management hole that allowed Leeson to operate. That theory is undoubtedly true but it is not very interesting. What is interesting, though briefly treated, is Leeson's arrogance in building a horrendously risky investment portfolio right under the noses of his bosses and several sets of auditors.

Leeson's destruction of Barings began with the creation of a special account that only he controlled and through which he concealed large and growing losses. All the while, Leeson's reputation and salary grew apace. Mildly colorful, with an apparent fondness for pulling down his trousers in public places, he was also considered brilliant. He made the firm $25 million to $30 million in a single year. But in late 1994 and early 1995, his chess game in Asian financial markets began to catch up with him.

What stopped him—and sunk the entity that used to be Barings—was a massive bet on the Japanese stock market in the form of purchases of futures pegged to the Nikkei 225, Japan's equivalent of the Dow Jones. Leeson's wager has been compared to "over and under" bets on a football game, meaning bets on the overall points scored, rather than on the outcome of the game itself. Leeson bet that the Nikkei would go up; instead, the Kobe earthquake sent it plummeting down. Leeson's response was to massively increase his investment—and, of course, his risk—hoping to singlehandedly influence the market. It didn't work. On February 23, 1995, Leeson fled his home in Singapore and was later arrested in Germany.

While the book chronicles in detail how Barings's management refused to listen to warning after warning about Leeson's behavior, it does not offer any real explanation for how a single individual could have been allowed to make an unauthorized, billion-dollar-plus investment of the company's money. For a more thorough explanation of this world-class mistake, we may have to wait for Nick Leeson's version.

S.C. Gwynne is the Austin bureau chief for Time.

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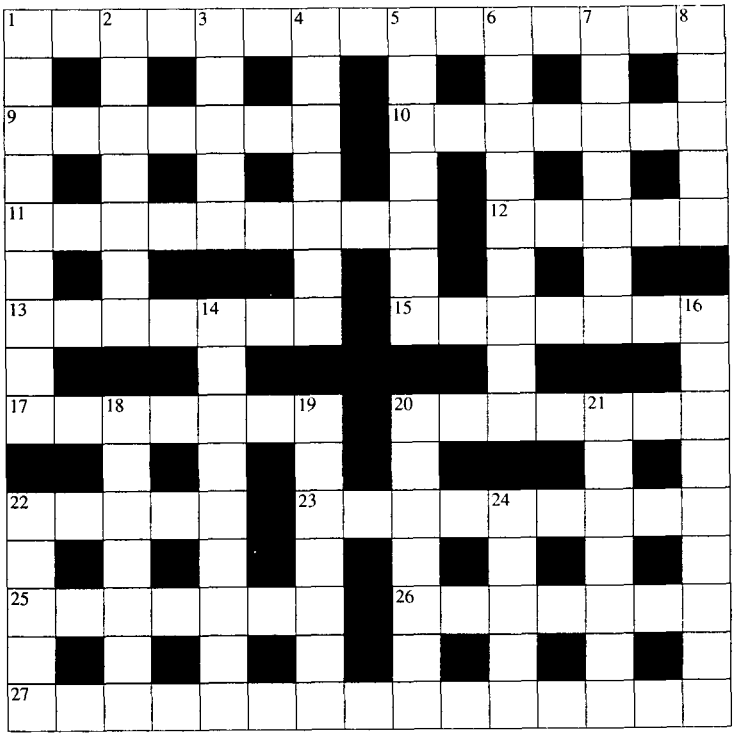
Political Puzzle

BY JOHN BARCLAY

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words—thus (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, such as USA, are treated as one word.



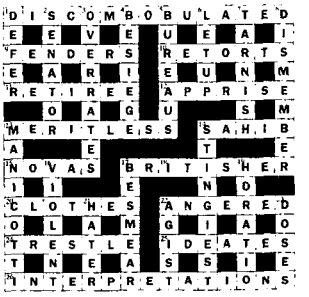
ACROSS

1. Clinton Bosnia policy demonstrating shallow red pride. (5,10)
9. Changing a creed around start of fight is sign of embarrassment. (3,4)
10. Father naps around mealtimes. (7)
11. Encouragement displayed in vice net. (9)
12. Get away with putting notice in the night before. (5)
13. Alternative arrangements are real tests. (7)
15. Machine part confused lad in tree. (7)
17. Go around displaying pen love. (7)
20. Part of Constitution makes it clear. (7)
22. Fast moving group. (5)
23. Procedure introduces proportion in tournament. (9)
25. Northeast storm disturbed teachers. (7)
26. GI alibi misled Mrs. Adams, for example. (7)
27. Modesty one comic assumed for competing Clinton concern. (8,7)

DOWN

1. Row's moire effect is cause for alarm. (9)
2. Communist accepting Italian leader to a lesser extent. (7)
3. Sketched doctor on part of wheat plant. (5)
4. Improperly see mine list from Nixon years. (7)
5. Reform red task for part of Africa. (7)
6. Stand for and about gift. (9)
7. Carefully manage first mate, for some. (7)
8. One group arranged poses. (5)
14. Son built a different set of rituals. (9)
16. Enter another way before friend forever. (9)
18. Maine TV production of once-divisive issue. (7)
19. Top lies about Hitler's fuel source. (7)
20. Mean something in Cleaver agenda. (7)
21. GI coach flight for central destination. (7)
22. Well-known and nourished around morning time. (5)
24. Juan's friend producing a note before game. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:



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